# THE READING REVIVAL

## READ, REMEMBER, TRANSFORM

## ICAN SAMA-O-BASR

AUTHORED BY: MUHAMMAD NABEEL MUSHARRAF

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لِوَجْهِ ٱللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنكُمْ جَزَآءً وَلَا شُكُورًا

Only for Allah's pleasure! We neither seek reward from you nor thanks.

(Published in Mar 2024)

**Sama-O-Basr**


## COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

ATTRIBUTION REQUIRED; SHARE-ALIKE

The publisher is pleased to allow this publication to be copied, printed or reproduced as per the provided CC licence. If you wish to publish it, please inform the publisher at: info@icandawah.org

# Table of Contents

**1. Living A Thousand Lives .....16**

1.1 Living a Thousand Lives Through Books .....16

1.2 Without Reading, One Remains Practically Illiterate .....17

1.3 The Aims of Reading .....17

**2. Transformative Power of Books.....25**

2.1 Revolutionary Attributes of The Divine Books: .....25

2.1.1 The First Command of The Greatest Revolutionary Book....26

2.1.2 The first revolution.....26

2.1.3 Quran's revolutionary call to transform the system .....27

2.1.4 Civilizational impacts: .....28

2.1.5 Islamic Golden Age: .....29

2.2 The Fruits of Nuṭq: How Human Speech and Writing Shaped History .....30

2.2.1 Plato's The Republic (c. 375 BCE) .....31

2.2.2 Poineering books of classical Islamic sciences: .....32

2.2.3 The Book of Chemistry (Kitāb al-Kīmiyāʾ) — Jābir ibn Hayyān (Geber, 8th–9th century) .....32

2.2.4 Al-Jabr Al-Muqabala (820) .....34

2.2.5 The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices (Banū Mūsā brothers, 9th century).....34

2.2.6 Kitāb al-Manāẓir, c. 1011–1021.....35

2.2.7 Al-Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb (1025) .....35

2.2.8 The Book of Mechanics (Kitāb fī maʿrifat al-ḥiyal al-handasiyya) — Al-Jazari (1206) .....35

2.2.9 Astronomical Tables (Zij al-Sultani) by Ulugh Beg (15th century).....36

2.2.10 95 Theses (1517).....36

2.2.11 John Locke's Two Treatises of Government (1689) .....37

2.2.12 Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica (1687, Isaac Newton).....37

2.2.13 Jean-Jacques Rousseau's The Social Contract (1762) .....38

2.2.14 Thomas Paine's Common Sense (1776) .....39

2.2.15 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' The Communist Manifesto (1848) .....39

2.2.16 On the Origin of Species (1859, Charles Darwin) .....40

2.2.17 Vladimir Lenin's What Is to Be Done? (1902).....41

2.2.18 Relativity: The Special and the General Theory (1916, Albert Einstein).....42

2.2.19 Mao Zedong's Quotations from Chairman Mao ("The Little Red Book," 1964) .....42

2.2.20 Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (1961).....43

2.2.21 Martin Luther King Jr.'s Stride Toward Freedom (1958)...43

2.2.22 Imam Khomeini's Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist (1970).....44

2.2.23 Nelson Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom (1994).....46

2.2.24 Learnings.....46

2.3 Conclusion: Reclaiming the Transformative Power of Books.....49

**3. The scholars and Imams of our Ummah and their love of books and reading.....51**

3.1 Introduction:.....51

3.2 A Prophetic Foundation.....52

3.3 The Delight of Acquiring Books.....53

3.3.1 Spending Wealth on Books.....53

3.3.2 Joy at Acquiring a Desired Work.....54

3.3.3 Passion Expressed in Remarkable Ways.....54

3.3.4 Ibn al-Qayyim's Legendary Collection.....55

3.3.5 The Etiquettes of Students with Books.....56

3.4 Love for Reading.....58

3.4.1 The Inner Taste: What Love of Reading Feels Like.....58

3.4.2 Solace of books:.....59

3.4.3 Lifelong Thirst: Testimonies of the Scholars.....59

3.4.4 Habits That Reveal the Love.....60

*Long hours & immersion.....60*

*Books Over Socialization.....63*

*Reading despite circumstances.....65*

*On the move & at all times.....66*

*Discipline to protect time.....67*

3.5 Grief at the loss of books ....68
3.6 Creating a Culture of reading and loving books: ....69
3.6.1 Cultural Initiatives: ....69
3.6.2 Sharing and Circulating Books ....69
3.6.3 Libraries: Storehouses of Knowledge ....71
*Private Libraries in the Islamic Tradition* ....71
*Early Models of Great Public Libraries* ....72
*The Spirit Behind These Libraries* ....73
*Takeaway for Today* ....73
3.6.4 Waqfs of books: ....73
3.6.5 Government Patronage: Rulers and Their Love for Books ...74
3.7 Conclusion ....77
**4. Books Peek Through ....79**
**5. The Reading Habit — A Tehreeki Perspective ....84**
5.1 Dawah through literature: ....85
5.2 The first and the foremost book that should be the companion of every tehreeki worker: ....85
5.3 The Pitfall of False Satisfaction from Cursory Reading ....87
5.4 Which areas to include in the study ....87
5.4.1 Deeper understanding of the Quran: ....87
5.4.2 Connection with Sirah: ....88
5.4.3 Fiqh of halal and haram: ....88
5.4.4 Methods of dawah driven from the Sirah: ....88

5.4.5 Islamic movememnt and the challenges of the current age: 89
5.5 Inevitable need for intellectual growth:.....89
5.6 The role of research institutions.....90
5.7 An important need of our time: .....91
5.8 Intellectual revolution: A pre-requisite for success .....91
**.6 The Importance of Studying the Sirah ﷺ.....93**
6.1 Beyond Celebration: The True Purpose of Studying the Sirah ...93
6.2 The Sirah as a Human Example .....94
6.3 The Hollow Spirit of Hero-Worship.....95
6.4 When Sirah Is Stripped of Its Civilizational Vision .....95
6.5 Enslaved by the System, Blind to the Sunnah.....96
6.6 The Prophet's Life ﷺ: Not for Recital, But for Revolution.....97
6.7 When Devotion Becomes a Mask for Denial.....98
6.8 From Cave to Caravan: The Sirah ﷺ as History in Motion .....99
6.9 Where All Greatness Converges: .....100
6.10 The School of the Greatest Man.....101
6.11 The Qur'an Wrapped, the Sīrah Shelved .....101
6.12 Turning the Sun into a Lamp for a Corner of One House.....102
**7. What to Include in Your Reading Plan.....103**
7.1 The Qur'an.....104
7.2 Reading in Your Profession Alongside Its Islamic Framework 104
7.3 The books of the pious predecessors (Salaf Ṣāliḥīn): .....104

7.4 Literature of the Islamic Movement and that which supports the work of the Islamic movement .....105
7.5 Other Contemporary Islamic Writings .....106
7.6 Study of Jahili (Un-Islamic) Ideas and Sciences .....106
7.7 Study of Literature .....107
**8. How to Select the Reading List for Each of the Categories in the Plan.....109**
8.1 Four Types of Books: .....109
8.2 Balancing the Time-Tested and the Contemporary .....110
8.3 Seek Guidance in Choosing Books .....112
8.4 Read what you need .....112
8.5 Foundations Before Depth .....113
8.6 The Interconnected Path of Study .....114
8.7 Read What You Apply.....114
8.7.1 Importance of practicing what you learn .....114
8.7.2 Dawrat At-Tadabbur.....114
8.7.3 Books that provide guidance about specific roles and tasks .....115
8.8 Do Prior Research.....115
8.9 Broadening Through Multi-Disciplinary Reading.....117
8.10 Don't Be Afraid to Quit Books .....117
8.11 Repetition of Reading Is Better than Diversification.....118
**9. Types of reading.....121**

9.1 Know your why ..... 121
9.2 The Four Levels of Reading: ..... 122
9.3 Elementary Reading: ..... 122
9.4 Inspectional Reading: ..... 123
9.4.1 What is this type of reading about? ..... 123
9.4.2 Two types of inspectional reading ..... 124
9.4.3 A word of caution ..... 124
9.5 Analytical Reading: ..... 124
9.6 Syntopical Reading: From Reading to Mastery ..... 125
**10. Preparing to Read ..... 128**
10.1 Psychological Preparation ..... 128
10.1.1 Seeing Beyond "I Already Know" ..... 128
10.1.2 Read What Genuinely Interests You ..... 129
10.1.3 The Blessing of Desirable Difficulties ..... 130
10.1.4 Setting Realistic Reading Goals ..... 134
10.1.5 Keep Books Accessible ..... 134
10.1.6 Interleaving and Diversifying Reading ..... 135
10.1.7 Give Yourself Rest breaks ..... 136
10.1.8 Mindfulness and Focus ..... 137
10.2 Intellectual Preparation ..... 137
10.2.1 Begin by refreshing in your mind the purpose of reading: ..... 138
10.2.2 Activate prior knowledge ..... 138

10.2.3 Gain a Bird's-Eye View of the Subject .....138
10.2.4 Listening to Book Summaries First and Last .....139
10.2.5 Vocabulary Building:.....139
10.3 Spiritual Prepration .....139
10.3.1 Purifying Intention (Ikhlāṣ in Seeking Knowledge) .....140
10.3.2 Duʿā for Understanding and Retention.....140
10.3.3 Avoid sin .....141
10.3.4 Avoid bad company .....142
10.3.5 Guard your senses, your body and your mind .....142
10.3.6 Seeking Barakah through Adab with Books and Teachers ... .....143
10.3.7 Balancing Knowledge with ʿAmal (Practice).....143
10.4 Physical Preparation.....144
10.4.1 Have Adequate Sleep: .....144
10.4.2 Healthy Diet and Exercise: .....144
10.4.3 Good Lighting .....145
10.4.4 Ergonomics .....145
10.4.5 The Best Times to Read .....146
10.4.6 Choosing the Right Medium.....148
10.4.7 Contextual Variation .....148
**11. Reading to Retain.....150**
11.1 Contextual Understanding.....151
11.2 The process of reading: .....152

11.2.1 Previewing and Skimming: ..... 152
11.2.2 Chunking the Book ..... 153
11.2.3 Engage Multiple Senses ..... 153
11.2.4 Taking Notes ..... 154
*Advice from the scholars about taking notes:* ..... *154*
*Note-taking as a Formative Engine of Islamic Thought* ..... *154*
*How should this be done?* ..... *156*
11.3 Gaining comprehension: ..... 156
11.3.1 Ask Questions: ..... 157
11.3.2 Dealing with Ambiguity in Reading ..... 158
11.3.3 Simplify the Concepts: ..... 160
11.3.4 Create Examples ..... 160
11.3.5 Identify and Analyze Arguments ..... 160
11.3.6 Summarize as You Read ..... 160
11.3.7 Group Related Concepts ..... 161
11.3.8 Build a Coherent Narrative ..... 161
11.3.9 Make Connections ..... 162
11.4 Tools for Retaining and Recalling Knowledge ..... 163
11.4.1 Mnemonic Devices: Patterns That Stick ..... 163
11.4.2 Visualization and Imagination: Making Knowledge Come Alive ..... 164
11.4.3 Mental Models and Mindmaps ..... 166
11.4.4 Comparative Reading: Surrounding a Topic ..... 168

11.5 Consolidating Knowledge ..... 169
11.5.1 Reflect on What You've Learned: ..... 169
11.5.2 Revisiting and Reviewing Knowledge ..... 170
11.5.3 Active Recall: Strengthening Memory Through Retrieval ..... 171
*Why Active Recall Works* ..... *172*
*Practical Methods* ..... *172*
*In the Spirit of the Scholars* ..... *172*
11.5.4 From Reading to Dialogue: Deepening Knowledge with Others ..... 172
11.5.5 Implementing Knowledge in Practice ..... 175
**12. Overcoming Barriers to Effective Reading ..... 177**
12.1 Overcoming Procrastination: ..... 177
12.1.1 Reduce Decision Fatigue ..... 177
12.1.2 Finish Your Day Before It Starts ..... 178
12.1.3 The "Nothing Alternative" ..... 178
12.1.4 Focus on the Next Action ..... 178
12.1.5 Shape Your Environment ..... 179
12.1.6 Recognize Fear and Resistance ..... 179
12.1.7 Accountability and Companionship ..... 180
12.1.8 Reward Progress ..... 180
12.1.9 Final Reflection ..... 180
12.2 Building a Consistent Reading Routine ..... 180

12.3 Making the Most of Idle Time....181
12.4 Overcoming Digital Distractions....183
12.5 Restoring Depth in Reading and Comprehension....184
12.6 Strengthening Concentration and Consistency....185
12.7 Addressing Learning Anxiety....186
12.8 Expanding Access to Books....187
**13. How to Cultivate a Culture of Reading....189**
13.1 Building Home Libraries....189
13.2 Reading Storybooks Aloud to Children....190
13.3 Enhancing School and University Libraries....191
13.4 Creating Public and Masjid Libraries....191
13.5 Incorporating Books into Curriculum Design....192
13.6 Trusted Recommendations and Reading Lists....193
13.7 Encouraging Book Clubs and Reading Circles....194
13.8 Establishing Digital Libraries and Free E-Book Access....194
13.9 Reading Challenges and Incentives....194
13.10 9. Snippets and Summaries for Busy Readers....195
13.11 Using Books as Gifts....195
13.12 Conclusion....196

# Foreword

أَنَّ الْحَمْدَ لِلَّهِ نَحْمَدُهُ وَنَسْتَعِينُهُ وَنَسْتَغْفِرُهُ

وَنَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ شُرُورِ أَنْفُسِنَا وَمِنْ سَيِّئَاتِ أَعْمَالِنَا

مَنْ يَهْدِهِ اللَّهُ فَلَا مُضِلَّ لَهُ وَمَنْ يُضْلِلْ فَلَا هَادِيَ لَهُ

وَأَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ وَأَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ

*Indeed All praise is due to Allah. We praise him, we seek His help, we seek His forgiveness, and we seek refuge in Allah from the evil within ourselves and our evil deeds.*

*Whomever Allah guides, there is none to misguide him. Whomever Allah leads astray, there is none to guide him. I testify there is no God but Allah alone, without any partners, and that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger.*

عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ عَمْرٍو قَالَ

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَيِّدِ الْعِلْمَ قُلْتُ وَمَا تَقْيِيدُهُ قَالَ الْكِتَابُ

*Abdullah ibn Amr R.A. reported: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "Bind the knowledge." I said, "How to bind it?" The Prophet said, "**The Book!**" (Source: al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ lil-Ṭabarānī 848 - Sahih li ghayrihi according to Shaykh Albani)*

## Why did we feel a need to write this book?

Reading is among the most powerful means by which hearts and minds are shaped. Yet, our relationship with books today suffers from many challenges. Some hardly read at all. Others read but fail to absorb fully,

leaving the lessons of great works untransformed into lived reality. In an age marked by confusion, distraction, and a lack of clarity, the need to connect deeply with books has only grown more urgent. It is through this connection that we find guidance, clarity, and strength. It was with this concern that I felt compelled to write the present work.

Over the years, I have sought out books in the English language that explore the art and discipline of reading. While some offered valuable insights, they often leaned heavily on philosophical musings without providing practical direction. Others were too brief, leaving many essential dimensions untouched. In contrast, the Arabic tradition boasts a wealth of profound and inspiring works on this subject—yet in English, such resources remain scarce. This book is a modest attempt to bridge that gap. Though I make no claim to have exhausted the breadth of this vast topic, I have endeavored to gather what I found most necessary and beneficial.

## How This Book Was Written

My method in writing has been straightforward: to weave personal reflections and experiences together with the timeless wisdom of our noble scholars. Some chapters are translations of important articles that, in my view, deserve a wider audience; others have been written afresh for this work. Specifically, Chapters 1, 4, 5, and 6 are translations, while the remaining chapters were composed to address the subject and topic at hand in a more holistic way. Taken together, they are intended to trace the full cycle of reading—from choosing the right book, to engaging with it deeply, to applying its lessons in one's life.

## Organization of Chapters

The chapters are arranged in three main parts:

- **Part One**: The purpose and benefits of reading, including the motivation drawn from the lives of our predecessors (*aslāf*). It comprises of chapters 1 to 4.

- **Part Two**: The place of reading within Islamic movements, and how it has shaped collective effort. It comprises of chapters 5 to 7.
- **Part Three**: Practical habits and strategies that make reading more effective and transformative. It comprises of chapters 8 to 13.

It is my hope that this work will not only encourage readers to return to books but also equip them with tools to read in a way that benefits both their worldly lives and their journey toward Allah ﷻ.

I end this foreword with a humble duʿāʾ: that Allah ﷻ accept this effort, make it a means of guidance and clarity, and count it as *ṣadaqah jāriyah* for me and for all those who benefit from it.

رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ○ وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

*Our Lord! Accept [this] from us; indeed, You are the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. And turn to us in mercy; indeed, You are the Accepting of repentance, the Most Merciful.*

Author,

*September 6, 2025*

Section 1

# Importance of Reading

(Chapter 1 to 4)

# 1. Living A Thousand Lives

*Excerpt from a speech by Maulana Saʿādatullah Hussaini at an SIO gathering, published in Haadiya Magazine (with additional commentary).*

## 1.1 Living a Thousand Lives Through Books

Reading is nourishment for the soul and the mind. Its importance is like that of food for the body. Just as deprivation of food weakens the body and ultimately renders it useless, neglect of good books weakens—and eventually deadens—our intellectual and spiritual faculties.

No matter how wise and grounded we might appear to be, our personal observations and experiences are bound by the narrow limits of time and place. Even at the close of a long and eventful life, we carry with us no more than eighty or ninety years of experience—an insignificant fraction as compared to the vast store of human experience. A lifetime of travel cannot take us everywhere; we cannot journey into the past; nor can we explore all the hidden dimensions of human thought and struggle. Reading connects us to all of this. It links us with the shared intellectual heritage of humanity. The observations of mankind, the fruit of thousands of years of reflection and striving, and the insights of hundreds and thousands of brilliant minds—reading brings all of this within our reach.

That is why it is said: he who does not read lives only one life, but he who cultivates the habit of reading lives a thousand lives. Through reading, moments from the rich lives of the towering figures like Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyyah, Aristotle and Plato, Mawdūdī and Iqbal, fall into our own laps. Their vision, their experiences, their reflections, and their understanding become, in part, our own. In this way, the reader becomes a companion of the great personalities of human history, sharing their company and fellowship. He sits in an assembly where the drama of history unfolds in its full grandeur, where the entire galaxy of human

thought, experience, and wisdom shines forth before him.

## 1.2 Without Reading, One Remains Practically Illiterate

A person who does not read is, in a sense, still illiterate. For the real benefit of literacy lies in the ability to read and write; if that purpose is not fulfilled, then literacy becomes meaningless. Likewise, if a person restricts himself only to technical books related to his profession or field, he too is effectively illiterate. Such a person is no more than a lifeless machine, designed for a single task. In the broader and higher affairs of life, there is little difference between him and a truly ignorant person.

Alvin Toffler once predicted that in the future, genetic engineering would create "semi-humans"—beings designed only for specific tasks (such as flying airplanes or performing some narrow corporate function). They would labor day and night, tirelessly and single-mindedly, in their assigned roles, yet remain utterly devoid of human sensitivities, emotions, or awareness of the wider realities of life. If the purpose of education is not to produce such "semi-humans," then we must admit that without a genuine love for reading, education and literacy remain empty shells.

## 1.3 The Aims of Reading

For Muslims—and especially for the workers of the Islamic movement—reading holds even greater significance. Their aim is nothing less than the leadership and guidance of the world. Leadership is deeply tied to knowledge, understanding, and awareness. Without these, one cannot even remain a true human being, let alone aspire to lead. The dignity of humanity lies in raising oneself to higher levels of thought, insight, and consciousness—and reading is the fundamental means to reach that station. Good books, and the habit of reading them, are as essential in their lives as air and water.

The purpose of reading should not be merely the transfer of information, but rather the attainment of *wisdom*.

وَمَن يُؤْتَ ٱلْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا (البقرہ: 269)

*"And whoever has been granted wisdom has indeed been granted abundant good."* (al-Baqarah: 269)

Wisdom is a heart-rooted perspective that shapes how a person sees events and actions. It provides true awareness of their purposes and meanings, and it nurtures an inner clarity that guides one toward right choices and sound conduct. In this way, wisdom is the capacity to look beneath the surface and grasp the deeper reality of things. Knowledge by itself often stops at the outer layer—what is visible to the eyes—whereas wisdom uncovers the truth hidden beneath, the part that is not immediately seen.

Wisdom has a deep connection with justice. That is why we are taught this supplication:

اللَّهُمَّ أَرِنِي الأَشْيَاءَ كَمَا هِيَ

*O Allah, show me things as they truly are.*[1]

---

[1] It is vital—especially for *tehreeki* workers—to cultivate the ability to perceive the true reality of things, rather than being content with a superficial or surface-level understanding. Such deep insight is indispensable, and for this reason the following supplication should remain ever-present in our hearts and minds. What follows is a reflection by Imām Ibn al-Jawzī, recorded in his work *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* (p. 439), concerning this duʿā that has been reported from some of the Salaf:

"It has been reported in the *athaar*: *"O Allah, show us things as they truly are."* Most people do not see things as they truly are. They see what is fleeting as if it were lasting, and they can hardly imagine the end of what they presently enjoy—even though they know in theory that it will pass. But the eye of perception is distracted by what is before it. Do you not see how pleasure vanishes while its sin remains? And if a thief could only see his hand being cut off, the stolen goods would appear trivial to him. So, the one who hoards wealth without spending it has not truly seen its reality, for wealth is nothing more than a means to an end—it is not desired in itself. And the one who looks at sin through the eyes of desire has not truly seen its reality, for sin is riddled with flaws, while its fruits are swift disgrace and certain punishment.

Consider the greatest of bodily desires: physical intimacy. The fulfilment of this desire

depends on food and drink [If the body is deprived of food and drink, it loses interest in physical intimacy and seeks instead to quench its thirst and satisfy its hunger. It is therefore important to understand how the food works.] If one reflects on a single morsel of food, he sees that it begins with plowing the earth, which requires oxen to pull the plow, fashioned from iron and wood, bound together with ropes. Reflect on the making of those ropes, the cultivation and weaving of hemp, the forging and shaping of iron, the growing and carpentry of wood, the turning of the wheel, the harvesting of crops, the threshing, winnowing, grinding, kneading, baking, and the work of the oven, the gathering of firewood—countless labors of countless people. It has even been said: not a single bite is eaten but that three hundred souls or more have had a hand in preparing it.

Then, when one eats that morsel, let him reflect further: on the creation of teeth to cut it, molars to grind it, the sweetness of saliva to moisten it, the tongue to turn it, and the muscles of the mouth to push some of it upward and some downward until swallowing becomes possible. Then the stomach receives it and delivers it to the liver, which cooks it until it becomes blood. Its dregs are sent to the spleen, its watery portion to the bladder, while the purest part is distributed to the liver, the brain, and the heart. From the very best of it, something is prepared in the testicles for the creation of another human being.

And when the fire of desire is stirred, that fluid is released—yet the Sacred Law has declared it pure. Likewise, purity has been decreed for the womb, and for the place touched by the male organ—from which the monotheistic human being is created.

Thus, this person comes into existence only through the most precious of processes, following marvels which we have merely pointed to, not fully enumerated.

So is it fitting, for one who understands this [and all the cycle and stages passing which this point is reached], to squander that precious drop in what is unlawful? Or to place it in a filthy place so that it is wasted? How many calamities are tied to fornication—calamities that outweigh, many times over, the fleeting pleasure of a moment! Among them are: the violation of honor before people; the exposure of private parts that are forbidden to be uncovered; the betrayal of a fellow Muslim by violating his wife, if she is married; and the disgrace brought upon the woman who is fornicated with—who, in reality, is like a sister or a daughter to him.

And if she conceives while having a husband, the child is attributed to that husband. Thus, the fornicator becomes the cause for inheritance to pass on to one who is unworthy, while being withheld from the rightful. As for the wrath of Allah Most High, it is beyond doubt. He has said:

وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا۟ ٱلزِّنَىٰٓ إِنَّهُۥ كَانَ فَٰحِشَةً وَسَآءَ سَبِيلًا

*"Do not go near adultery. It is truly a shameful deed and an evil way."* (al-Isrāʾ 17:32)

Wisdom grants us a true and just awareness of things and actions—for when wisdom is present, we see reality as it truly is. Without it, prejudice distorts: magnifying some things, diminishing others. Prejudice and emotionalism blind us, but wisdom opens our eyes.

> Without wisdom, even the good in an enemy will appear evil. Without wisdom, the despairing see only ruin and darkness. Without wisdom, we fail to notice the beam in our own eye. Without wisdom, we cannot appreciate the virtues of the young or of the next generation—we see only their faults. Without wisdom, we overlook the weaknesses of those we love and deny the virtues of those we dislike.

The absence of wisdom clouds our vision. It places tinted lenses over our eyes, trapping us in tunnel vision. False understanding produces false decisions, false decisions lead to false actions, and false actions give rise to destructive consequences.

That is why wisdom produces sound deeds and movements, while the

---

And the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said:

ما من ذنبٍ بعدَ الشركِ، أعظمَ عند اللهِ من نطفةٍ وضعها رجلٌ في رَحِمٍ لا يَحِلُّ له

*"There is no sin, after shirk, greater in the sight of Allah than a drop [of semen] that a man places in a womb that is not lawful for him."(Narrated by Ibn Abī al-Dunyā in al-Waraʿ; no. 137 - Daif).*

Whoever possesses true understanding recognizes that the ultimate purpose of that drop [of fluid] is the bringing forth of human beings who affirm the Oneness of Allah. Were it not for the embedding of desire, intercourse would never take place—for, in reality, it is merely the joining of two organs, neither attractive in form nor pleasant in smell. It is only desire that veils the eye, so that procreation may occur in the first place. Desire itself is but incidental.

Thus, whoever chases after desire while forgetting the gravity of his crime in fornication has failed to see things as they truly are. The same principle applies to food and drink, the hoarding of wealth, and other such matters."

*(END QUOTE)*

absence of wisdom produces harmful actions. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim defined wisdom as follows:

*"The correct awareness of the tasks that must be carried out, the correct understanding of the methods by which they should be carried out, and the correct sense of their proper timing."*[2]

---

[2] The following is a more detailed account of the statement of Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim in this regard (*Kitab ul Hikmah*, p.20; *Madarij al-Salikin*, "The Station of Wisdom," 2/478.):

قال ابن القيم: والحكمة، حكمتان: علمية، وعملية. فالعلمية: الاطلاع على بواطن الأشياء، ومعرفة ارتباط الأسباب بمسبباتها، خلقا وأمرا، قدرا وشرعا. والعملية، كما قال صاحب المنازل: وضع الشيء في موضعه.

*Imam Ibn al-Qayyim said: Wisdom is of two kinds: theoretical and practical. The theoretical is to gain insight into the inner realities of things and to understand the connection between causes and their effects — in creation and command, in decree and in law. The practical, as the author of Manāzil (i.e. Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim) said, is to place things in their proper position.*

He placed wisdom into three levels:

- **The first level:** To give everything its due right, not to exceed its limit, not to hasten it before its time, and not to delay it beyond its time.

- **The second level:** It is to witness Allah's fulfillment of His promise, to recognize His justice in His judgment, and to see His mercy even in what He withholds. At this level, wisdom is understood — as the people of affirmation and the Sunnah explain — to mean the noble ends intended by Allah, exalted is He, in His creation and command: the purposes for which He decreed, commanded, and brought things into being.

- **The third level**: It is to reach, in your reasoning, the level of clear insight (baṣīrah); in your guidance, the level of truth and reality; and in what you point others toward, the ultimate goal. Imam Ibn al-Qayyim explained: this means rising through reasoning to the highest degree of knowledge — the state of baṣīrah, where knowledge enters the heart as directly and vividly as sight enters the eye. This was the special quality that set the Companions apart from the rest of the Ummah, and it represents the loftiest rank of the scholars.

It is important to note the following definitions of Hikmah too. Imam Al-Nakhaʿī defined it as follows:

هي معرفة معاني الأشياء وفهمها.

*It is the knowledge of the meanings of things and understanding them.*

You can find a striking similarity between the above and the key message of the dua that we explained earlier. Similarly, Imam Al-Hasan Al-Basri defined it in relation to the final fruits and outcomes:

These two definitions are deeply connected. For only after seeing things and actions as they truly are, can one grasp what needs to be done, how it should be done, and when it ought to be done. **Thus, the purpose of *reading* should be the attainment of wisdom.**

> Without reading, a person remains imprisoned within the narrow confines of his own experience, the circle of like-minded individuals around him, and the narrow angle of his own thought—a kind of intellectual prison. This "dome of self" breeds prejudice. He becomes unable to see things and actions freely, in their true form and color. Reading frees him from this shell. It exposes him to diverse ideas, broadens his knowledge, and allows him to benefit from experiences beyond his own circle. He becomes familiar with the arguments of opponents and the intellectual frameworks in which they think. In this way, wisdom begins to take root within him.

And such wisdom is required in all aspects of life.

In the life of a worker of the Islamic movement, three kinds of matters arise. First, he must live as an ordinary human being and as a practicing Muslim. He must conduct himself in his home, neighborhood, and workplace as a perceptive and intelligent person. He must raise his children properly, manage matters of land and property, provide his sons and daughters with sound education and correct career guidance, and arrange their marriages. In the office, at home, in the neighborhood and village, he must deal with a variety of civic and social issues. He must travel, plan his finances, and make good and proper use of whatever

---

وقال الحسن: الورع في دين الله. (كأنّه فسّرها بثمرتها ومقتضاها).

*Al-Ḥasan said: It is piety in the religion of Allah – (as though he explained it by its fruit and necessary outcome.)*

resources and technologies are available for a successful life. All of these matters demand wisdom.

Another purpose of reading should be that our knowledge and awareness in all these matters become so sound and well-grounded that we are able to make timely, correct, and appropriate decisions. Our outlook on things and actions should be free of every form of excess and deficiency, and firmly rooted in reality.

---

For this purpose, while the fundamental study of religion is indispensable, it is equally necessary to engage in that reading which grants insight into the world, our era, our surroundings, and our circumstances.

---

Second, a worker in the Islamic movement must live with purpose. Before him lie the tasks of daʿwah, tarbiyah, and reform, as well as the pressing issues of the country and the world, all of which confront him as challenges. He must acquire a deep understanding of them. He must also gain a clear awareness of the movement's objectives, its ethos, and its methods, and develop the ability to chart paths for the successful progress of the movement amid the conditions and challenges of the nation and the world. This, too, requires wisdom. One of the aims of reading, therefore, must be to nurture this wisdom within us.

---

Third, whatever field a person has chosen for the service of humanity and the movement, he should be able to excel in it. If he is a speaker, he should be an effective and successful one. If he is a writer or thinker, he should advance the world through his knowledge and insight. If he is a leader, he should master the art of leadership. If he is a doctor, he should become, in line with the spirit and intent of Islam, a pioneer of innovative contributions in medical science. And if he is an economist, he should elevate the field of economics to new heights under the guidance of Islamic

thought. All of these endeavors, too, demand wisdom.

---

Imām al-Ghazālī divided knowledge into two categories: **farḍ ʿayn** (an individual obligation) and **farḍ kifāyah** (a communal obligation). In the same way, reading too can be divided into farḍ ʿayn and farḍ kifāyah.

The reading that provides a foundational understanding and awareness of religion is **farḍ ʿayn**—that is, it is obligatory upon every Muslim. This includes knowledge of what is ḥalāl and ḥarām, the obligatory duties and their correct modes of performance, rights, and the teachings of Islam pertaining to one's profession and line of work.

In today's age, an educated person encounters doubts, confusions, and misleading ideas at every step concerning the basic beliefs of Islam. Therefore, we may rightly say that a sound understanding of creed (ʿaqīdah), along with familiarity with the essential evidences that defend and support Islamic beliefs and ideas, is also part of the knowledge that is obligatory for every Muslim—since it is directly connected to the protection of one's faith.

Furthermore, if one regards the work of daʿwah (calling to Islam) and movement-related efforts as an obligation, then the knowledge required for carrying out these tasks must also be deemed obligatory.

# 2. Transformative Power of Books

## 2.1 Revolutionary Attributes of The Divine Books:

Throughout history, books have stood at the heart of revolutions, intellectual movements, and societal change. The divine scriptures — from the scrolls of Ibrāhīm (ʿalayhi as-salām) to the greatest book of all time, the Qur'an — stand unmatched in their revolutionary spirit. They transformed hearts, reshaped civilizations with guidance from Allah, clarified the path to success in this world and the next, and gave rise to societies built on justice, compassion, fairness, and truth.

When Mūsā (ʿalayhi as-salām) was given the Tawrāh, it was not only a code of law but also a force that broke the chains of Firʿawn's tyranny and built a community on divine justice after centuries of oppression. When ʿĪsā (ʿalayhi as-salām) was given the Injīl, it shattered hollow ritualism and corruption, calling people back to sincerity, mercy, and the spirit of the law. Each scripture, in its time, ignited revolutions that changed the course of history and restored divine guidance to societies that had gone astray.

And with the Qur'an — the final, complete, and eternal revelation — came the greatest revolution of all: a transformation that reached from the deserts of Arabia to the corners of the earth, establishing a light that will never be extinguished until the Day of Judgment. The Qur'an came as a force that shook the world.

وہ بجلی کا کڑکا تھا یا صوتِ ہادی

عرب کی سرزمیں جس نے ہلادی

*Was it a crash of thunder, or the voice of a guide,*
*That shook the very land of Arabia?*

### 2.1.1 The First Command of The Greatest Revolutionary Book

In the 7th century, the revelation of the Qur'an to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ marked a monumental shift in human history. The very first word revealed was "Iqra" — "Read!" — a command that placed knowledge and learning at the heart of Islam's mission. This divine call ignited a hunger for knowledge that became a defining feature of the early Muslim community.

### 2.1.2 The first revolution

The Qur'an's first and greatest revolution began in the hearts of the Ṣaḥābah (may Allah ﷻ be pleased with them all). Within years, men and women once steeped in idol-worship, vendettas, and ignorance were transformed into a generation of light. Their hearts melted before the words of Allah, their priorities were reshaped, and they rose to carry the message of tawḥīd to the corners of the earth. The Qur'an describes this change:

وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا۟ مَآ أُنزِلَ إِلَى ٱلرَّسُولِ تَرَىٰٓ أَعْيُنَهُمْ تَفِيضُ مِنَ ٱلدَّمْعِ مِمَّا عَرَفُوا۟ مِنَ ٱلْحَقِّ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَآ ءَامَنَّا فَٱكْتُبْنَا مَعَ ٱلشَّـٰهِدِينَ

*"And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of the truth they have recognized."* (Qur'an 5:83)

From this inner transformation flowed outward change. A people once lost in tribal wars and moral corruption were raised to become leaders of nations. The Qur'an overturned oppressive structures, built a society on tawḥīd, justice, and mercy, and gave the world a new model of civilization.

The Arabs, proud of their eloquence, found themselves silenced by the Qur'an. Their greatest poets and orators, who once swayed gatherings with spontaneous verse, were left powerless before its majesty. Human words collapsed before divine speech, and a new authority of truth was established.

The tide then spread beyond Arabia. The mighty empires of Caesar and Chosroes, which had dominated much of the known world, fell before the rising Ummah. Their unjust systems gave way to a divinely guided order that uplifted humanity with justice, mercy, and dignity.

### *2.1.3 Quran's revolutionary call to transform the system*

Allah ﷻ entrusted Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his Ummah with a mission in relation to the Dīn of Islam:

لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ

*"…so that He may make it prevail over all other ways of life."* (Qur'an 9:33)

This awakening drove the Ṣaḥābah to carry the light of Islam far beyond Arabia — to Persia, Byzantium, North Africa, and beyond. The Qur'an not only purified their souls but charged them with a mission: to establish justice, spread knowledge, and guide humanity.

يَٰٓأَيُّهَا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ كُونُواْ قَوَّٰمِينَ بِٱلْقِسْطِ شُهَدَآءَ لِلَّهِ وَلَوْ عَلَىٰٓ أَنفُسِكُمْ أَوِ ٱلْوَٰلِدَيْنِ وَٱلْأَقْرَبِينَ إِن يَكُنْ غَنِيًّا أَوْ فَقِيرًا فَٱللَّهُ أَوْلَىٰ بِهِمَا فَلَا تَتَّبِعُواْ ٱلْهَوَىٰٓ أَن تَعْدِلُواْ وَإِن تَلْوُۥٓاْ أَوْ تُعْرِضُواْ فَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ كَانَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرًا

*"O believers! Stand firm for justice as witnesses for Allah even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or close relatives. Be they rich or poor, Allah is best to ensure their interests. So do not let your desires cause you to deviate from justice. If you distort testimony or refuse to give it, then indeed Allah is All-Aware of what you do."* (Qur'an 4:135)

The Qur'an was never meant as a book of private devotion alone; it is, and remains, a blueprint for a just and moral order. Until such a revolution of justice is established and sustained, believers cannot rest. Allama Iqbal captured this duty with piercing words:

چشمِ اقوام سے مخفی ہے حقیقت تیری

ہے ابھی محفلِ ہستی کو ضرورت تیری
زندہ رکھتی ہے زمانے کو حرارت تیری
کوکبِ قسمتِ امکاں ہے خلافت تیری

وقتِ فُرصت ہے کہاں، کام ابھی باقی ہے
نُورِ توحید کا اِتمام ابھی باقی ہے

*"Hidden still from the eyes of nations is your true reality;*
*The assembly of existence is still in need of you.*
*It is your passion that keeps the world alive;*
*Your caliphate is the star of destiny for all creation.*

*Where is the time for leisure? The work is not yet done;*
*The light of tawḥīd has yet to be perfected."*

The Qur'an's vision embraces every sphere of life — ethics, governance, economics, social relations — and the revolution it calls for must be equally comprehensive. Its mission is not confined to hearts alone, but extends to societies and civilizations, until justice, mercy, and tawḥīd shine across the earth.

### *2.1.4 Civilizational impacts:*

From this foundation emerged a civilization in which the pursuit of knowledge was held as a sacred duty. The Qur'an's call to reflect, to ponder, and to seek understanding of the heavens and the earth stirred Muslims to explore the world around them with both reverence and curiosity:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ وَٱخْتِلَٰفِ ٱلَّيْلِ وَٱلنَّهَارِ لَءَايَٰتٍ لِّأُو۟لِى ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ

*Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the day and night there are signs for people of reason.* (Quran 2:190)

ٱلَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ ٱللَّهَ قِيَـٰمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِى خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَـٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَـٰذَا بَـٰطِلًا سُبْحَـٰنَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ

*Those who remember Allah standing and sitting, and (lying) on their sides, and ponder on the creation of the heavens and the earth (and say) "Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. We proclaim Your purity. So, save us from the punishment of Fire.* (Quran 2:191)

As the Qur'an's message spread, it sparked a cultural and intellectual awakening. Muslim scholars pursued mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy, driven by its command to seek knowledge.

In this pursuit, they forged a deep and enduring bond with books — a relationship expressed in many forms, yet bound by a single thread: a passion for the written word, enriched both by engagement with older cultures and by the drive for new discoveries. Out of this grew practices such as a fascination with collecting books, the development of an ethical code for borrowing them, and the integration of this passion into the waqf (endowment) system, placing knowledge at the heart of the ummah's civilizational journey. Wherever Muslims settled, they built libraries, centers of learning, and institutions of knowledge. One early example was the Qarawiyyīn University in Fez, Morocco, founded in the 9th century by Fatima al-Fihri — a Muslim woman whose vision established one of the world's oldest universities still in operation today.

### *2.1.5 Islamic Golden Age:*

By the 8th century, this Qur'anic spirit had ushered in the Islamic Golden Age, lasting until the 14th century. The Muslim world became the global epicenter of scholarship, scientific advancement, and intellectual pursuit.

Under the Abbasid Caliphate, knowledge reached unprecedented heights. The caliphs established *Bayt al-Ḥikmah* (the House of Wisdom) in Baghdad, where scholars translated major works from Greek, Persian, and Indian traditions into Arabic. Such was their reverence for knowledge that books were sometimes bought by their weight in gold. From this

fertile environment arose a vast legacy of scholarship, with countless luminaries leaving their mark across every field. Among them were Imam al-Shāfiʿī in jurisprudence, al-Khwarizmi — the pioneer of algebra, al-Razi in medicine, and al-Ghazali in philosophy and theology — just a few from a long line of scholars whose contributions shaped not only Islamic thought but the entire course of human knowledge.

Meanwhile, in the West, Al-Andalus (Islamic Spain) flourished as another beacon of learning. Córdoba, its capital, housed libraries with hundreds of thousands of manuscripts and attracted scholars from around the world. Thinkers such as Ibn Rushd and Ibn Hazm advanced knowledge in law, philosophy, science, and literature. The intellectual vibrancy of Al-Andalus left a profound mark on both the Islamic world and Europe, laying important foundations for the Renaissance.

From the tear-filled eyes of the first believers who encountered revelation, to the thriving libraries of Baghdad and Córdoba, the Qur'an's transformative power can be traced across centuries. It reshaped individuals, built institutions, and gave birth to a civilization that became a beacon of knowledge, justice, and spiritual strength for the world.

## 2.2 The Fruits of Nuṭq: How Human Speech and Writing Shaped History

No speech can ever compare to the speech of Allah, and no book can stand beside the Qur'an — the eternal word of the Creator, unmatched in guidance, eloquence, and transformative power. The Qur'an is perfect, timeless, and sufficient until the Day of Judgment. By contrast, human writings, however insightful, remain limited, imperfect, and bound by their moment in history.

Yet Allah ﷻ, in His mercy, bestowed upon humankind a great gift: the ability to speak and to write. It was among the very first blessings taught to man — *"He taught him speech and expression"* (Qur'an 55:4). And Allah swore by this gift, saying:

ن وَٱلْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ

*"Nun. By the pen and what they inscribe."* (Qur'an 68:1)

Through this gift of nuṭq (expression), fleeting thoughts have been preserved, carried across time, and handed down from one generation to the next. This power to record and transmit has produced countless books throughout history. Though finite and imperfect, these works of human thought have at times stirred societies, challenged prevailing orders, and reshaped the direction of nations — sometimes for the good, sometimes for the worse. Yet, they nevertheless left a profound impact on masses of people.

In what follows, we will glance at some of these human works to reflect on how Allah ﷻ has placed in the written word a power to shape human history. Reading about them will allow you to witness revolutions unfold before your eyes, and to reflect on why and how such books were written and what impact they carried. It will also open doors for deeper research, helping you understand the psychology of what moves people and what sparks revolutions.

And when you embark on your own journey of لِيُظْهِرَهُۥ عَلَى ٱلدِّينِ كُلِّهِۦ, you will do so with a broader perspective. With this context, let us now turn to some of the writings that shaped human history.

### *2.2.1 Plato's The Republic (c. 375 BCE)*

Plato's *Republic* is one of the earliest works of political philosophy, exploring justice, the nature of the ideal state, and the role of the philosopher-king. Though not revolutionary in its own time, it became a foundation for later political thought, offering a vision of ordered governance and education that inspired generations. Ibn Rushd produced a commentary on Plato's *Republic*. Its influence echoed through centuries, shaping debates about justice, law, and power, even as critics argued that its rigid hierarchy based on absolute monarchy and censorship leaned toward authoritarianism and extensive use of coercion.

### 2.2.2 *Poineering books of classical Islamic sciences:*

Turning to the early centuries of Islam, we encounter some of the most revolutionary works in intellectual history — the great compilations of ḥadīth. The muḥaddithūn undertook immense efforts to preserve the Prophet's ﷺ words and deeds with precision. They developed rigorous methods of isnād (chain of transmission) criticism, traveling vast distances to verify even a single narration. Their compilations not only safeguarded the Sunnah but also established a model of scholarly scrutiny unmatched in other civilizations, setting the gold standard for authentication and transmission of knowledge.

Alongside this, new sciences emerged to govern how the Qur'an and Sunnah would guide law and daily practice. Imām al-Shāfiʿī's al-Risāla (8th–9th century) is widely recognized as the first systematic treatise on uṣūl al-fiqh (principles of jurisprudence), laying down clear rules for deriving rulings from foundational sources. This pioneering work revolutionized Islamic legal thought by defining categories of evidence, clarifying the role of consensus (ijmāʿ) and analogy (qiyās), and uniting the methodology of diverse juristic traditions.

Similar breakthroughs were made in other disciplines: uṣūl al-ḥadīth, ʿilm al-rijāl (biographical evaluation of narrators), and the sciences of tafsīr (Qur'anic exegesis). Each field was shaped by pioneering texts that created structured methods for preserving, interpreting, and applying revelation.

---

These works were not mere books — they were the birth of disciplines. They transformed how knowledge was recorded, critiqued, and transmitted, ensuring that the Qur'an and Sunnah remained living guides for the Ummah across generations.

---

### 2.2.3 *The Book of Chemistry (Kitāb al-Kīmiyāʾ) — Jābir ibn Hayyān (Geber, 8th–9th century)*

Regarded as the foundational text of chemistry, Jābir ibn Hayyān's work systematized experimentation, describing distillation, crystallization, and purification processes that became essential to laboratory science. He introduced terms still in use today, such as alkali and alcohol, and laid the groundwork for both chemistry and pharmacology. The *Book of Chemistry* spread into Europe through Latin translations, deeply influencing alchemy and early modern science. His insistence on observation and experiment was revolutionary, earning him the title "father of chemistry."

Allama Muhammad Iqbal upon seeing the books of Muslims in Europe cried:

کبھی اے نوجواں مسلم! تدبّر بھی کیا تُو نے
وہ کیا گردُوں تھا تُو جس کا ہے اک ٹُوٹا ہوا تارا

عرض مَیں کیا کہُوں تجھ سے کہ وہ صحرا نشیں کیا تھے
جہاں گیر و جہاں دار و جہاں بان و جہاں آرا

تجھے آبا سے اپنے کوئی نسبت ہو نہیں سکتی
کہ تُو گُفتار وہ کردار، تُو ثابت وہ سیّارا

گنوا دی ہم نے جو اسلاف سے میراث پائی تھی
ثُریّا سے زمیں پر آسماں نے ہم کو دے مارا

مگر وہ عِلم کے موتی، کتابیں اپنے آبا کی
جو دیکھیں ان کو یورپ میں تو دل ہوتا ہے سیپارا

*O young Muslim! Have you ever reflected,*
*What was that firmament, of which you are but a fallen star?*

*What words can I use to tell you what those desert-dwellers were —*
*Conquerors of the world, rulers of the world, guardians of the world, adorners of the world.*

*You can claim no kinship with your forefathers,*
*For you are speech without action, while they were steadfastness in motion.*

*We squandered the inheritance we had received from our noble ancestors —*
*From the heights of the Pleiades, the heavens have cast us down upon the earth.*

*Yet the pearls of knowledge, the books of our forefathers —*
*When I see them in the libraries of Europe, my heart is torn apart.*

### 2.2.4 *Al-Jabr Al-Muqabala (820)*

Al-Khwarizmi's *Al-Jabr* (*The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing*, c. 820) was the first systematic treatise on algebra, establishing it as a standalone discipline. It introduced fundamental methods such as "restoration" (*al-jabr*) and "balancing" (*al-muqābala*) and provided clear procedures for solving linear and quadratic equations, complete with geometric justifications. Translated into Latin in the 12th century, the work became Europe's principal algebra text through the 16th century. *Al-Jabr* revolutionized how humanity understood and taught calculation, laying the bedrock for modern mathematics.

---

Indeed, most of the modern scientific and engineering achievements — from precision instruments and architectural design to missile systems and aircraft — would not have been possible without the foundations established by this groundbreaking work.

---

### 2.2.5 *The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices (Banū Mūsā brothers, 9th century)*

This remarkable work compiled over one hundred mechanical inventions, including fountains, automatic instruments, and self-operating machines powered by air and water pressure. It demonstrated

an advanced understanding of mechanics and hydraulics, centuries before such knowledge appeared in Europe. Translated into Latin, the book influenced medieval engineering and the later European Renaissance. This treatise laid the foundation for robotics, automation, and fluid mechanics, marking a revolution in applied science.

### 2.2.6 *Kitāb al-Manāẓir, c. 1011–1021*

Ibn al-Haytham's *Book of Optics* (Kitāb al-Manāẓir, c. 1011–1021) is a groundbreaking seven-volume treatise that challenged the ancient extramission theory—where sight was thought to emit from the eyes—and instead argued, through careful experimentation, that vision occurs when light enters the eye. It pioneered the scientific method in optics, introduced the camera obscura, and laid the groundwork for a physical and mathematical understanding of light and visual perception. The work was widely translated and profoundly influenced medieval and Renaissance Europe, shaping optics, physics, mathematics, art, and perspective techniques. This work ushered in a revolution in how humanity sees, studies, and represents the world.

### 2.2.7 *Al-Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb (1025)*

Ibn Sīnā's *The Canon of Medicine* (*al-Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb*, completed in 1025) is a monumental five-volume medical encyclopedia that synthesized Greco-Roman, Persian, Indian, and Islamic medical knowledge into a clear, systematic compendium. It became the standard medical textbook across the Islamic world and, after its Latin translation from the 12th century, served as the foundation of medical teaching in European universities well into the 17th century. By organizing treatments, anatomy, drugs, and clinical observations into an accessible canon, it dramatically transformed both medical practice and education.

### 2.2.8 *The Book of Mechanics (Kitāb fī maʿrifat al-ḥiyal al-handasiyya) — Al-Jazari (1206)*

Al-Jazari's illustrated treatise is often hailed as the most important pre-modern work on mechanical engineering. It described water-raising

devices, intricate clocks, and automata such as humanoid servants and musical machines. Many of his designs represented the **first known programmable machines**, blending artistry with engineering. His work directly influenced later mechanical traditions, including those in Renaissance Europe. The *Book of Mechanics* firmly established him as a pioneer — the "father of robotics" — and transformed the future of engineering.

### 2.2.9 *Astronomical Tables (Zij al-Sultani) by Ulugh Beg (15th century)*

Compiled under the direction of the Timurid ruler and astronomer Ulugh Beg, these astronomical tables contained some of the most precise observations of the stars before the invention of the telescope. Produced at his observatory in Samarkand, they offered highly accurate calculations of planetary motions and stellar positions, surpassing anything available in Europe at the time. The *Zij al-Sultani* influenced both Islamic and European astronomy for centuries. While later instruments refined these values further, Ulugh Beg's tables marked a revolution in precision science, marrying royal patronage with rigorous observation.

### 2.2.10 *95 Theses (1517)*

Martin Luther's *95 Theses* (1517), nailed to the church door in Wittenberg, openly attacked the sale of indulgences and the corruption of the Catholic Church. By challenging papal authority and shifting emphasis from ritual to faith, it triggered the Protestant Reformation — a movement that broke the Church's centuries-long dominance over Europe. The Christian world before it was one where the Church dictated not only belief but politics, wealth, and even kings. However, the one after it was fractured but freer in a way, as Protestantism gave rise to new churches, national governments less bound to Rome, and a surge in literacy through vernacular Bibles. At the same time, Luther's reforms splintered Christendom and set Europe on a path of prolonged conflict, showing how one book could both liberate and divide at the same time.

### 2.2.11 John Locke's Two Treatises of Government (1689)

John Locke[3]'s *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), written after England's Revolution, argued that humans are born with natural rights — life, liberty, and property — and that governments exist only by the consent of the governed. If rulers betrayed this trust, the people not only could but should resist and replace them. These ideas marked a decisive shift: before Locke, monarchy and the so-called "divine right" of kings largely defined political authority; after him, the language of rights and consent became the foundation for liberal democracy, fueling revolutions on various parts of the globe.

His vision, however, was incomplete — women, indigenous peoples, and enslaved populations were excluded from his definitions of liberty, exposing deep contradictions in Enlightenment thought. Still, this book brought a revolution of its own kind, reshaping political philosophy and the structures of governance for centuries to come.

### 2.2.12 Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica (1687, Isaac Newton)

Newton's *Principia* laid down the laws of motion and universal gravitation, unifying terrestrial and celestial mechanics under one framework. It revolutionized physics, astronomy, and engineering, becoming the foundation of modern science and the Industrial Revolution. Its methods also cemented the role of mathematics as the

---

[3] John Locke (d. 1704) was an English philosopher and physician, widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers of the Enlightenment and often called the "father of liberalism." At the heart of liberalism lies the idea of individual freedom — the right to think, speak, associate, and live according to one's own choice. Locke's writings on natural rights, government by consent, and the separation of powers laid much of the groundwork for later political revolutions. His ideas profoundly shaped the English, American, and French revolutions, where liberal principles were invoked to challenge and overturn existing regimes.

One major consequence of liberal thought was the call to separate the authority of religion from that of the state. What began in Europe as a move to limit the political power of the church eventually evolved into a broader project of secularism, redefining the relationship between religion, society, and governance.

language of science. Critics note that Newton's framework was eventually surpassed by relativity and quantum physics, but its impact on the 18th and 19th centuries was unmatched.

### *2.2.13 Jean-Jacques Rousseau's The Social Contract (1762)*

*The Social Contract* argued that true political authority rests not with monarchs or elites but with the "general will" of the people. His famous declaration, "*Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains,*" struck directly at entrenched hierarchies and offered a vision of popular sovereignty. The book became a cornerstone of the French Revolution, justifying rebellion against monarchy and laying the groundwork for republican ideals that reshaped modern notions of equality, citizenship, and sovereignty.

Rousseau himself, however, did not wield power nor lead revolutions. In his lifetime, he faced sharp criticism and much opposition. Yet his writings struck at the heart of the political order of his age, and their appeal to the oppressed and the ambitious alike carried them far beyond his desk. Revolutionaries in France seized upon his words, turning them into slogans and manifestos that fueled upheaval. His idea of the "general will," though inspiring, was vague enough to be misused — at times invoked for reform and renewal, at other times twisted to justify bloodshed and tyranny. This pattern is not unique to Rousseau: history shows that while thinkers often fail to bring about change themselves, their ideas in the hands of others can ignite movements far more radical, for better or worse, than the author ever intended.

In contrast, John Locke (d. 1704) advanced a very different foundation for political life. He rooted authority in natural rights — life, liberty, and property — arguing that governments exist to protect these rights and may be overthrown if they fail. For Locke, freedom meant being free from interference, a vision close to what we now call liberalism. Rousseau, by contrast, tied freedom to collective sovereignty: true liberty was to obey the laws the community set for itself, even if that limited individual choice. For Locke, property was sacred and central to liberty, while for Rousseau it was a source of inequality and corruption to be restrained.

Politically, Locke's ideas shaped constitutional democracies like America, while Rousseau's fueled the French Revolution with its radical calls for equality and popular sovereignty.

From an Islamic perspective, both visions ultimately remain flawed, as true freedom is not found in submission to the self or the collective, but in submission to the Creator. Yet their influence on the modern world remains undeniable: Locke left behind the legacy of liberal democracy built on individual rights, while Rousseau's legacy was radical republicanism built on the will of the people.

### *2.2.14 Thomas Paine's Common Sense (1776)*

Published at the height of colonial discontent, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (1776) was a fiery call for American independence from Britain. Written in clear, passionate language, it denounced monarchy and championed republican self-rule, reaching ordinary colonists in a way few political writings had before. Its rapid spread turned discontent into determination, directly fueling the American Revolution and shaping the birth of a new nation.

### *2.2.15 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' The Communist Manifesto (1848)*

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) was a brief but forceful call for workers of the world to unite, predicting that the class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie would inevitably end in revolution. Rejecting capitalism, it envisioned a stateless, classless society built on collective ownership. The text became one of the most influential political tracts, inspiring socialist and communist movements and shaping revolutions in Russia, China, and far beyond. Even though it brought those revolutions, its utopian vision often proved destructive in practice, as Marx's neglect of human complexity and the rigid application of his ideas gave rise to oppressive regimes — a reminder that ideology, when detached from ethical checks and the balance inherent in divine commands, can devastate societies.

### *2.2.16 On the Origin of Species (1859, Charles Darwin)*

Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) introduced the theory of evolution by natural selection — the idea that species change over time through variation and the survival of the fittest. Though Darwin drew upon observations of finches, fossils, and breeding, his theory rested largely on speculation. He lacked knowledge of DNA, genetics, or molecular biology, and could not explain many aspects of biological complexity. Modern science has since replaced much of his framework with genetics, molecular biology, and systems theory.

Despite its scientific gaps, the book spread rapidly in Victorian England and beyond, becoming the dominant lens through which biology was viewed. Its influence quickly spilled into psychology, anthropology, and especially politics, where "social Darwinism" emerged. Here the theory was twisted into a justification for racism, colonialism, and inequality. One stark example is how European colonists, influenced by racialized hierarchies cloaked in evolutionary language, treated Aboriginal Australians as "less human." Such attitudes fueled policies of dispossession, child removal, and cultural erasure — atrocities legitimized by a pseudoscientific racism rooted in distorted Darwinian thought.

Several factors explain why Darwin's ideas spread so widely. They appeared at a time when Europe was questioning religious explanations under Enlightenment rationalism and the rise of modern science. The theory also resonated with the competitive ethos of industrial society and conveniently served political agendas, especially in the age of empire. Advocates like Thomas Huxley pushed Darwinism aggressively in universities, journals, and public debates, embedding it into education. At the popular level, figures such as Herbert Spencer reduced its complexity to slogans like "survival of the fittest," which made it easily digestible but dangerously misleading.

In the end, *On the Origin of Species* shifted attention toward naturalistic explanations of life, but its speculative basis and its exploitation for

ideological purposes reveal the limits — and dangers — of its enduring influence.

### *2.2.17 Vladimir Lenin's What Is to Be Done? (1902)*

Vladimir Lenin (d. 1924), the leader of the Bolshevik movement, reshaped Marxist thought into a practical program for revolution. In his pamphlet *What Is to Be Done?* (1902), Lenin argued that revolution could not be left to the "spontaneous" awakening of the working class, as Marx envisioned. Instead, it required a tightly organized, disciplined, and centralized party of professional revolutionaries to guide the masses with strategy and precision. This blueprint became the ideological backbone of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, which toppled the Russian monarchy and gave rise to the Soviet Union.

The book's influence, however, extended far beyond theory. Lenin's emphasis on centralized control laid the groundwork for the atrocities that followed: the *Red Terror* (mass executions and imprisonments), the crushing of the *Kronstadt Rebellion* where even former allies were massacred, the silencing of rival socialist groups, the persecution of religion, and harsh policies like grain requisitions during "War Communism" that deepened the famine and claimed millions of lives. His ideas gave clarity and momentum to a movement, but they also sowed the seeds of authoritarian rule.

For us as readers, the book offers sobering lessons. Ideas that seem powerful and persuasive on paper can, when cut off from ethical and moral grounding, unleash immense brutality. Most importantly, it reminds us of the responsibility we carry as readers: revolutionary words may inspire and ignite, but before accepting them we must pause and ask with full seriousness — *if this idea were applied in full, what kind of society would it create?* The answer to that question is what separates wisdom from destruction.

In the end, *What Is to Be Done?* demonstrates the immense power of the written word: a slim pamphlet that helped ignite one of the greatest

revolutions of the 20th century — one that promised liberation but delivered decades of oppression.

### *2.2.18 Relativity: The Special and the General Theory (1916, Albert Einstein)*

Einstein's accessible explanation of relativity transformed physics, overthrowing Newton's absolutes of time and space. It reshaped astronomy, cosmology, and technology, from GPS satellites to nuclear energy. The book not only influenced science but also culture, symbolizing the new horizons of the 20th century. While quantum mechanics later challenged its completeness, relativity remains a pillar of modern science and one of the greatest intellectual revolutions of the modern era.

### *2.2.19 Mao Zedong's Quotations from Chairman Mao ("The Little Red Book," 1964)*

Mao Zedong (d. 1976), the founding leader of Communist China, sought not only political power but also a complete reshaping of Chinese society. After taking control in 1949, he aimed to transform politics, culture, and even personal beliefs through the strict lens of communist ideology. His theories, which he advocated as a Chinese adaptation of Marxism–Leninism, are known as Maoism.

In 1964, his sayings were gathered into a small pocket-sized volume titled Quotations from Chairman Mao, soon known worldwide as the "Little Red Book." Produced in staggering numbers, it was distributed to millions of citizens — students, workers, and soldiers alike — who were expected to carry it everywhere, recite its contents, and treat its words as unquestionable truth. For many, it became more than a political manual; it was revered almost like a sacred text.

Two years later, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), a campaign to "purify" China by eradicating what he called the "Four Olds": old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas. The Little Red Book became the central tool of this movement, offering slogans and

justifications for revolutionary zeal. Young people, organized into militant groups known as the Red Guards, were stirred to action by Mao's words. They turned against teachers, intellectuals, religious leaders, and even family members, branding them as enemies of the revolution.

The results were catastrophic. Libraries and historical monuments were destroyed, priceless traditions were lost, and countless lives were upended through humiliation, imprisonment, torture, and death. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of people, perhaps millions, perished in the violence of the Cultural Revolution. What began as an effort to forge unity and revolutionary spirit ended as a decade of chaos and suffering.

The story of the Little Red Book stands as a stark reminder of how the written word, when tied to unchecked ideology and absolute authority, can move millions — but also devastate an entire society.

### *2.2.20 Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth (1961)*

*The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), written in the heat of decolonization, argued that violence was not only inevitable but necessary in the struggle against colonial oppression. Beyond politics, it probed the deep psychological scars left by colonization and mapped out a path toward liberation. The book quickly became a handbook for anti-colonial movements across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, fueling uprisings against imperial powers. Yet Fanon's justification of violence remains one of the most contested aspects of his thought, as it often legitimized cycles of brutality that undermined the very justice and freedom such struggles sought to achieve.

### *2.2.21 Martin Luther King Jr.'s Stride Toward Freedom (1958)*

Martin Luther King Jr.'s Stride Toward Freedom (1958) is a landmark work in the modern history of nonviolent revolution. The book tells the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–1956), a protest in the city of Montgomery, Alabama, sparked when Rosa Parks, an African American woman, refused to give up her seat to a white passenger as segregation

laws demanded. In response, the Black community organized a year-long boycott of the city's buses — walking, carpooling, and finding every possible alternative to avoid riding segregated buses.

King, a young pastor at the time, emerged as a leader of the movement. In Stride Toward Freedom, he shows how what began as a local protest grew into a powerful demonstration of disciplined, collective action. His book articulated a clear philosophy of nonviolence — grounded in the belief in racial equality, the sanctity of human dignity, and the power of steadfast perseverance. For African Americans, this was not just theory — it became both a moral framework and a practical strategy for resisting injustice.

The influence spread quickly. Churches, student groups, and community organizations across the United States drew from King's teachings, organizing sit-ins (peaceful occupations of segregated spaces), marches, and freedom rides (interracial bus trips through the South to challenge segregation laws).

Thus, Stride Toward Freedom became more than a memoir of one city's protest. It was a manual for peaceful resistance, showing ordinary people how to confront oppression without violence. In doing so, it helped turn the Civil Rights Movement into a mass movement that reshaped American society and advanced the struggle for equality.

### *2.2.22 Imam Khomeini's Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist (1970)*

Imam Ruhollah Khomeini's *Islamic Government* set out the doctrine of Wilāyat al-Faqīh — the guardianship of the jurist — asserting that in the absence of the infallible Imam, qualified Islamic scholars must assume leadership to ensure that divine law governs society. The book rejected secular politics that sought to push Islam into the private sphere and instead reaffirmed Islam as a comprehensive way of life in which faith and governance are inseparable. It presented the state not as a purely administrative body but as a trust to safeguard justice, moral order, and

accountability before Allah ﷻ.

Initially circulated as lectures delivered by Khomeini while in exile, the text was smuggled into Iran, copied by hand, and passed secretly among students, clerics, and activists. The courage and dedication of his followers turned fragile pages into a living movement. They bore the risk of arrest and torture, yet continued to duplicate and spread the work, ensuring that its ideas reached seminaries, universities, and marketplaces.

By the late 1970s, *Islamic Government* had become both a manifesto and a roadmap for those resisting the Shah's regime. Its vision united diverse groups — scholars, students, and workers — under the shared conviction that governance must be anchored in divine law. When mass protests erupted, the doctrine of Wilāyat al-Faqīh offered not only critique but also a concrete alternative: a system in which leadership derived from religious legitimacy rather than tyranny or foreign influence.

Thus, what began as a set of lectures evolved into the ideological backbone of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The Shah's monarchy collapsed, and the Islamic Republic was established upon the very foundations articulated in Khomeini's book. Supporters hailed it as the revival of Islam's rightful role in shaping society, while critics feared its implications for political freedom. Either way, its impact was undeniable: a text that moved from hidden gatherings to the public square, and from whispered copies to the corridors of power, sparking one of the most significant upheavals of the 20th century.

For us as readers, there is a crucial lesson here: books become revolutionary not only because of their authors, but also because of the dedication of those who carry their message forward. Khomeini's followers did not wait for easy conditions — they copied his words by hand, took risks to circulate them, and sacrificed their comfort for a cause they believed in. Their perseverance turned a text into a movement, and a movement into a revolution. The power of a book is multiplied when readers live its message, spread it with sincerity, and are willing to pay a price for truth.

### 2.2.23 Nelson Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom (1994)

Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994) is the powerful autobiography that chronicled his fight against apartheid and his 27 years of imprisonment. More than a personal story, it became a symbol of South Africa's long struggle for justice, giving voice to the hopes of those who had suffered under racial oppression. By laying bare both the cruelty of apartheid and the spirit of perseverance that overcame it, the book offered inspiration not only to South Africans in their journey toward reconciliation but also to oppressed peoples worldwide who drew courage from Mandela's example. His work endures as a testimony of resilience, leadership, and the moral power of forgiveness in the face of injustice.

### 2.2.24 Learnings

From the discussion above, several key lessons emerge, including:

- Books hold the potential to spark revolutions, but only when they are truly engaged with and lived by their readers. A book left on a shelf is powerless; its words gain life only when absorbed, reflected upon, and acted upon with sincerity. The Qur'an transformed the world not simply because it was recited, but because it was embodied — first by the Prophet ﷺ and then by the Sahaba (raḍiyallāhu ʿanhum), whose devotion and sacrifices made divine guidance a living force in society. From their example we learn a timeless truth: revolutionary ideas require committed followers who are willing to bear hardship and labor tirelessly to carry them forward.
- he Qur'an is the greatest revolutionary book. Just as it transformed nations in the past, it continues to call us today — urging us to engage with it, reflect upon it, and let it reshape our lives and societies through its divine guidance. In every era, it unveils new insights and solutions, addressing the needs of its time. Our success, both in this world and the next, is inseparably tied to our bond with the Qur'an.

Allama Iqbal, with his piercing words, pointed to the root cause of our decline as an Ummah: our estrangement from the Book of Allah. He lamented:

ہر کوئی مست مئے ذوق تن آسانی ہے

تم مسلماں ہو یہ انداز مسلمانی ہے

حیدری فقر ہے نے دولت عثمانی ہے

تم کو اسلاف سے کیا نسبت روحانی ہے

وہ زمانے میں معزز تھے مسلماں ہو کر

اور تم خوار ہوئے تارک قرآں ہو کر

*Everyone is intoxicated with the wine of ease and comfort;*
*And you call yourselves Muslims — is this the way of Islam?*

*Neither the spiritual strength of ʿAlī remains,*
*Nor the wealth and power of Uthman.*

*What spiritual connection do you still have*
*With the legacy of your noble predecessors?*

***They were honored in the world by being true Muslims,***
***And you are disgraced today by abandoning the Qur'an.***

- No book sparks change in isolation. Even the most powerful works need supportive structures — teachers, communities, and movements that embody their ideas. Without such lived models, books remain abstract, but with them they become revolutions in action.
- Some books reveal their power only later. Not every book changes the world the moment it is written. Sometimes its ideas lie dormant, unnoticed or resisted in their own age, only to resurface and shape

revolutions generations later. For example, many works of Greek philosophy and science seemed to fade in their own lands but were preserved and expanded upon by Muslim scholars during the Islamic Golden Age. Centuries later, these texts re-entered Europe and became seeds of the Renaissance and modern science. Similarly, Marx's writings were far from mainstream in his own lifetime, yet decades later they became rallying cries for political revolutions. Many other examples can also be given to elaborate this point. For us as readers, the lesson is clear: do not measure the value of a book only by its immediate impact. Ideas may take root slowly, but when embraced by committed readers and followers, they can travel across time, inspire movements, and reshape the course of history.

- Books preserve revolutions of thought. They carry the debates, discoveries, and wisdom of earlier generations so that later readers can revive, refine, and build upon them. This is why reading across cultures and centuries is essential for growth.
- Not all revolutions are equal. Some books led to justice and liberation, while others fueled oppression and chaos. Reading critically helps us distinguish between ideas that uplift and those that destroy, always measuring them against the timeless standards of divine guidance.
- Common patterns run through these revolutionary books and the revolutions they brought. Across history, the way ideas spread and ignite movements often follows recurring patterns. Some of these are psychological — how people are inspired, persuaded, or mobilized. Others are social and political — how ideas resonate with grievances, how networks spread them, and how they challenge or align with power structures. Taken together, these elements form what could be called a "science of revolutions." For workers of Islamic movements, this study is not academic curiosity but a vital necessity. Their mission is to strive for the supremacy of Allah's dīn, and for that they must understand how ideas take root, how they gain followers, and how they can reshape societies. By reflecting on the rise and spread of past revolutions, they can learn

strategies, avoid pitfalls, and better fulfill their role in reviving Islam's transformative guidance.

## 2.3 Conclusion: Reclaiming the Transformative Power of Books

The first and foremost takeaway we want every reader to carry with them is the importance of a living connection with the Qur'an — the greatest book of revolution in all of history. It is the eternal speech of Allah ﷻ, *al-Furqān*, the Criterion that distinguishes truth from falsehood, and the guide by which all ideas, movements, and books must be judged. Through it, Allah ﷻ raised nations from weakness to strength, from darkness to light, and from humiliation to honor. And through neglect of it, others were left to disgrace and decline. The Prophet ﷺ and his Companions (raḍiyallāhu ʿanhum) lived the Qur'an until it became a transformative reality: shaping hearts, reforming societies, and giving birth to a civilization rooted in justice, mercy, and tawḥīd.

It is the only book in history — and its revolution the only revolution in history — where the message and its full revolutionary implementation unfolded within the lifetime of the very person - the noblest of the Prophets and the best of the creation, our master, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ - through whom it was revealed. For us to regain our honor and strength, renewing our bond with the Qur'an and with the Sahib al-Qur'an ﷺ is inevitable.

شعور لایا کتاب لایا
وہ حشر تک کا نصاب لایا
دیا بھی کامل نظام اس نے
اور آپ ہی انقلاب لایا
وہ علم کی اور عمل کی حد بھی
ازل بھی اس کا ہے اور ابد بھی

وہ ہر زمانے کا راہبر ہے
مرا پیمبر عظیم تر ہے

*He brought awareness, He brought the Book,*
*A curriculum lasting until the Day of Judgment He brought.*
***He gave the complete system,***
***And He Himself brought the revolution.***
*He is the boundary of knowledge and of action,*
*His is the Beginning and His is the End.*
*He is the guide for every age,*
*My Prophet is the greatest of all.*

Utilizing Allah's gift of *nuṭq* (speech and expression), human beings have produced revolutionary ideas and books too — some leading to renewal, others leaving behind injustice, bloodshed, or confusion. Not every book holds true transformative power, and not every revolutionary text is worthy of imitation. The lesson for us is not to take them as guides, but to study them critically: to see how they spoke to the needs of their time, how they appealed to emotions, and how their followers carried their messages into movements. These are insights in method, not in message.

For today's workers of Islamic movements, this distinction is vital. We study the history of books and revolutions to understand the psychology of change and the dynamics of society — but we anchor ourselves only in the Qur'an, drawing from it our principles, our vision, and our ultimate mission. By holding firmly to this Book, we guard ourselves from being deceived by the errors of history and prepare the ground for the transformation our age so desperately needs.

# 3. The scholars and Imams of our Ummah and their love of books and reading

## 3.1 Introduction:

Books have the power to ignite revolutions and shape entire civilizations. Yet their first touch is not on societies, but on the hearts of individuals. A heart illuminated by knowledge becomes the seed of transformation — and it is Allah ﷻ who prepares and chooses certain hearts for that light. History testifies that our pious predecessors (*aslāf*) — men and women of insight, sincerity, and devotion — were among those chosen. Their hearts glowed with knowledge, enabling them to see beyond appearances and discern truth as it truly is.

Because they recognized the true worth of ʿilm, they held books in the highest esteem. To them, books were not lifeless objects, but companions in worship, means of drawing nearer to Allah ﷻ, and lifelong nourishment for mind and soul. This reverence shaped not only their scholarship but the rhythm of their daily lives.

Out of this reverence grew a remarkable discipline. Entire chapters of *Ādāb Ṭālib al-ʿIlm* (the etiquette of the student of knowledge) detailed a student's conduct with books: how to copy them with precision, the choice of fine paper, the quality of pen and ink, and the respect owed to written knowledge. Imam Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī described how he carefully distinguished his notes with different colors before committing his reflections to writing. Imam Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, in his celebrated *Taqyīd al-ʿIlm*, included a chapter titled: *"Those who shun people's company and find their companionship in reading."* And Imām Abū Dāwūd's attachment to books was so intense that he had one sleeve of his garment tailored wide enough to carry them, while the other remained narrow. One can almost picture him walking the streets, texts tucked securely in his sleeve — a scholar whose very clothing bore witness to his devotion.

In the pages that follow, we will journey through the lives of these lovers of books: observing their eagerness in acquiring them, their care in preserving them, their habits in reading them, and the etiquette they upheld as seekers and teachers of knowledge. More importantly, we will discover the practical disciplines they modeled — habits of reading, reflection, and benefiting from books that remain as relevant today as they were in their time.

Their legacy reminds us that the love of reading is more than an intellectual pursuit. It is a discipline of the heart, a devotion of the spirit, and ultimately a path to light.

---

By beholding their bond with books, we wish and aim to kindle our own flame.

---

Their relationship and love for books is aptly expressed in the words that follow:

فهي جليسهم الذي لا يُمَلّ، ورفيقهم في السفر، ومائدتهم في الجلسات، وأنيسهم في الخلوت.

*Books were their tireless companion, their travel partner, their table in gatherings, and their solace in solitude.*

## 3.2 A Prophetic Foundation

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

مَنْهُومَانِ لا يَشْبَعَانِ طَالِبُهُمَا طَالِبُ عِلْمٍ وَطَالِبُ الدُّنْيَا

*"The seekers of two concerns are never satiated: the seeker of knowledge and the seeker of the world."* (Al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr lil-Ṭabarānī 10388 – Saheeh)

This ḥadīth captures the insatiable thirst for knowledge that flowed through the lives of our scholars. The passages that follow give us a glimpse of how this spirit lit up their days and nights. They longed to gather more books, they never tired of reading, and they could hardly be

separated from their beloved collections. Such a deep and tender love for knowledge is a gift unique to the Ummah of Muhammad ﷺ.

## 3.3 The Delight of Acquiring Books

Acquiring books has always carried its own special delight — a taste known only to those who have experienced it. For the lovers of knowledge, books were not just possessions but treasures, companions, and lifelines to the past.

### *3.3.1 Spending Wealth on Books*

Many of the scholars spent vast sums, or even all their wealth, in pursuit of books.

- **Imām ʿAbdullāh ibn al-Mubārak (**d. 797 AD**)** once sold a piece of property in order to buy the book al-Funūn.
- Ibn Rajab, in Dhail Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah (vol. 1), records from Imām Ṭalḥah al-ʿAlthī that when the library of Ibn al-Jawālīqī was put up for sale in Baghdad, **al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū al-ʿAlāʾ al-Hamadhānī** (d. 1174 AD) attended the auction. A portion of the collection was called at sixty dinars, and he purchased it for that amount, with payment due from one Thursday to the next. He then departed for Hamadhān, where he announced the sale of his house, which was valued at sixty dinars. When some remarked that it would surely fetch more, he replied: "Sell it for sixty." They sold it, and he took the money, returned swiftly to Baghdad, and on Thursday paid the full price for the books—his situation remaining unknown to others until much later. And among the signs of acceptance of his deep passion for knowledge and love for books is what Ibn al-Jawzī relates of him that he was seen in a dream in a city whose very walls were composed of books, surrounded by countless volumes and wholly engrossed in reading them. When asked: "What are these books?" he replied: "I asked Allah to occupy me in the Hereafter with what had preoccupied me in the world—and He granted it to me."

- **Al-Fīrūzābādī** (d. 1415 AD) purchased books for fifty thousand mithqāl of gold and would never travel without loads of them, so he could read wherever he stopped.[4]

- **Salman al-Ḥamawī** (d. 1705 AD)'s wife reproached him for spending everything on books, and he replied in verse:

  *She said: "You've spent all your wealth on books!"*

  *I said: "Leave me be…*

  *Perhaps I may find in them a book*

  *That guides me to take my Record in my right hand, secure."*

- **Shaykh ʿAbdullāh al-Duwaysh R.A.** (d. 1987) devoted all the money that came into his hands to purchasing works of ḥadīth and fiqh.

### 3.3.2 *Joy at Acquiring a Desired Work*

The joy of obtaining a book sometimes reached the point of tears.

- **Imam Ibn al-Jawzī** (d. 1201) said: "When I find a new book, it is as if I have stumbled upon a treasure."[5]

- Shaykh Aḥmad al-Bāṭilī relates: When al-Sunan al-Kubrā of al-Nasāʾī was first printed, he gifted a copy to **Shaykh Ḥasan ibn ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Mānīʿ R.A.** (d. 1921). The Shaykh gasped with joy, wept, and said: "May Allah have mercy on Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm Āl al-Shaykh, who would always say: If only this book were printed! Praise be to Allah that I have now obtained it."

### 3.3.3 *Passion Expressed in Remarkable Ways*

---

[4] See: Al-Munjid, Muhammad. *Makānat al-Kutub ʿInd ʿUlamāʾ al-Muslimīn* (The Status of Books Among Muslim Scholars). Published December 24, 2011.

[5] Ibid

The passion for books manifested in remarkable and sometimes extreme forms:

- Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar mentions in al-Durar al-Kāminah (vol. 1), in the biography of **Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī al-Kinānī** (d. 730 AH): "He loved collecting books, to the extent that when he died he left behind nearly twenty libraries filled with precious works. And such was the intensity of his love for books that whenever he touched one, he would say: 'This is such-and-such a book; I acquired it at such-and-such a time.' And if anyone asked him for any volume, he would immediately rise, go to the library, and retrieve it as though he were placing his hand on it in the exact spot where he had originally put it."

- **Al-Jāḥiẓ** (d. 868) said: "Whoever does not find spending on books more delightful than the infatuation of those obsessed with singers or palaces will never attain a praiseworthy rank in knowledge." (al-Ḥayawān, 1/55)

- **Shāfiʿ ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAsqalānī** (d. 1330) was blind, yet so devoted to collecting books that he could identify each one by touch and recall when he had acquired it.

- **Imam Abū Muḥammad Ibn Ḥazm** (d. 1064), in Risālat Marātib al-ʿUlūm, listed the pillars of knowledge. Among those, he also includes— "Amassing books, for no book is without benefit or an increase in knowledge that one may find in it when needed. It is impossible for a person to memorize all the knowledge he possesses, and since that is not feasible, books are an excellent treasury to return to when required. Were it not for books, knowledge would be lost and unavailable. It is a mistake to criticize the abundance of books. If such an opinion were followed, knowledge would perish.."

### *3.3.4 Ibn al-Qayyim's Legendary Collection*

Among the scholars famed for their love of books, Imām Ibn Qayyim al-

Jawziyyah R.A. (d. 1350) stands out. His companions and biographers unanimously praised his devotion:

- **Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373)**: *"He acquired from books what none could obtain even a tenth of—from the writings of the early and later scholars."*
- **Ibn Rajab (d. 1393)**: *"He was extremely passionate about knowledge, about writing, and about acquiring books, obtaining what no one else attained."*
- **Ibn Ḥajar (d. 1449)**: *"He was infatuated with collecting books, acquiring what cannot be enumerated."*

Importantly, his passion was not mere collection. He combined it with seriousness in study, diligence in reading, and a life organized around benefiting from what he acquired. In addition, he wrote countless books with his own hand:

- **Ibn Kathīr** said: *"He wrote, with his fine handwriting, a great deal."*
- **Ibn Rajab**: *"He wrote, in his own hand, more than can be described in quantity."*

This may have included both his authored works and copied manuscripts, especially in his early years of study.

### *3.3.5 The Etiquettes of Students with Books*

Before continuing, an important clarification: the purpose of collecting books is not to amass them aimlessly. A library without purpose is like a field left unsown. Books must serve two higher aims.

**First**, they should be used as tools for sincere learning in the way of Allah ﷻ.

**Second**, beyond personal study, both knowledge — and when appropriate the books themselves — should be passed on to those who can benefit even more. As the Prophet ﷺ said:

نَضَّرَ اللَّهُ امْرَأً سَمِعَ مِنَّا حَدِيثًا فَحَفِظَهُ حَتَّى يُبَلِّغَهُ فَرُبَّ حَامِلِ فِقْهٍ إِلَى مَنْ هُوَ أَفْقَهُ مِنْهُ وَرُبَّ حَامِلِ

فِقْهٍ لَيْسَ بِفَقِيهٍ

*May Allah brighten a man who hears a tradition from us, gets it by heart and passes it on to others. Many a bearer of knowledge conveys it to one who is more versed than he is; and many a bearer of knowledge is not the faqeeh.* (Sunan Abi Dawud 3660 – Saheeh)

The first aim is a duty upon every seeker. Striving for both aims together brings excellence and broader benefit. But merely stockpiling books without learning from them or sharing their benefit is a misguidance.

This brings to mind an incident from Australia. A father, though neither trained in the Islamic sciences nor fluent in Arabic, devoted himself to gathering Arabic books — classical references, commentaries, and rare works. His sons often wondered why he poured so much time and money into books he could not fully benefit from himself. Years later, when the sons matured, all four became scholars of Islam through their father's efforts. Only then did they grasp the wisdom behind his dedication: he had prepared the soil long before the seeds of learning were planted, and his children reaped the harvest from the collection he had preserved for them.

This balance—between acquiring books and knowing how to use them—is precisely what our scholars emphasized. **Al-ʿAllāmah Badr al-Dīn ibn Jamāʿah** R.A. (d. 1333), when speaking of the etiquette of the student of knowledge with books, said:

"The first: A student of knowledge should take great care to obtain the books he needs, as much as possible—whether by purchase, or by rental, or by borrowing—for they are the tools of learning."

Yet he also cautioned that merely collecting and amassing books is not sufficient for advancement in knowledge. To truly benefit, one must combine collection with seriousness in study, constant reading, and dedicating time and energy to reflection. He further said:

"He should not make the collecting of books and boasting of their

abundance his portion of knowledge, nor their accumulation his share of understanding, as many who falsely claim to study fiqh and ḥadīth do. How excellent was the one who said: *If you are not a memorizer, the [one being] mindful [of his responsibility]… then your collecting of books will not benefit you*."

Thus, while books are treasures, their true worth lies not in how many fill our shelves, but in how deeply they enter our hearts and transform our lives.

## 3.4 Love for Reading

Lovers of beneficial books often left behind stories that reveal the depth of their attachment to them—stories that inspire awe and admiration.

### *3.4.1 The Inner Taste: What Love of Reading Feels Like*

Reading the truly beneficial—"*Allah said, the Messenger ﷺ said, the Righteous Scholars said*"—has a unique delight known only to those who live with such books as companions. They feel restless without them and alive in their company.

- In the biography of **al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū Ṭāhir ibn Abī al-Ṣaqr** (d. 476 AH), Ibn al-Jawzī, in Al-Muntaẓam (vol. 1), said about him: "He was among those who journeyed far and wide across lands, and who gathered knowledge from many scholars in various cities. He used to say: 'These books of mine are dearer to me than their weight in gold.'"
- Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī said of **Imam Ibn Taymiyyah** (d. 1328): "His soul was never satisfied with knowledge, nor quenched from reading, nor weary of study. Rarely did he enter a field of knowledge without having doors opened to him that were overlooked by its greatest masters." (al-ʿUqūd al-Durriyya, p. 5)
- **Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah** (d. 1350) wrote: "As for the lovers of knowledge, their passion for it is greater than the passion of any lover for the beloved. Many of them are not distracted from it even by the most beautiful image of human beings." (Rawdat al-

Muḥibbīn, p. 69)

- A contemporary shaykh (may Allah preserve him) said: "Between me and books is a bond of love and long companionship since my youth. Even beside my bed there must be a stack—sometimes simply to gaze upon."

### *3.4.2 Solace of books:*

The scholars' words also echo timeless wisdom about the solace of books:

- One of the wise said: "Whoever is alone with knowledge will never feel loneliness in solitude; whoever finds solace in books will never be deprived of comfort; and whoever finds intimacy in reciting the Qur'an will never feel the loss of companionship."

- **Abū al-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī R.A**. (d. 965), the great poet, declared: "The most honored place in the world is the saddle of a swift horse; And the best companion in time is a book."

- In the biography of **Imām al-Ḥāfiẓ al-Ḥasan ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī** (d. 1174)**,** in Al-Dhayl ʿalā Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanābilah (vol. 3), his student al-Ḥāfiẓ ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Ruhāwī said about him: "He was free from the love of wealth and held it in low regard. Though he was the son of merchants, he sold everything he inherited and spent it in pursuit of knowledge—traveling to Baghdad and Isfahan **multiple times on foot, carrying his books on his back**".[6]

### *3.4.3 Lifelong Thirst: Testimonies of the Scholars*

- **Ibn al-Jawzī** (d. 1201): "I can never have enough of books. If I see one I have not read, it is as if I have found a treasure**… If I said I had read twenty thousand volumes, it would be an**

[6] Al-ʿImrān, ʿAlī. Al-Mushawwiq ilā al-Qirāʾah wa Ṭalab al-ʿIlm (The One Who Inspires Toward Reading and Seeking Knowledge), p. 45

**understatement**—and I was still only in pursuit."[7]

- What is related here illustrates the unceasing thirst of **Imām Ibn Taymiyyah** (d. 1328) for knowledge and his enduring devotion to books.

    - **Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim** (d. 1350): When a physician warned that study worsened his illness, he answered: "My soul rejoices in knowledge; by it my nature is strengthened and I find relief."[8]

    - **Ibn ʿAbd al-Hādī** (d. 1344) said about him: "His soul was never satisfied with knowledge, nor quenched from reading, nor weary of study."

    - Another remarkable account illustrates the vast breadth of books Imam Ibn Taymiyyah had read and absorbed. **Imam Al-Sakhāwī** (d. 1497), in Al-Jawāhir wa al-Durar (vol. 2), narrates from Qāḍī Shams al-Dīn ibn al-Dīrī, who said: "I heard Shaykh ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Basṭāmī—in Bayt al-Maqdis—say, when asked: 'Have you seen Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah?' He replied: 'Yes.' I asked, 'What was he like?' He said: 'Have you seen the Dome of the Rock?' I said, 'Yes.' He said:

      كان كقُبَّة الصخرة مُلأ كتبًا لها لسان ينطق

      'He was like the Dome of the Rock—filled with books, and they had a tongue that spoke.'"

### *3.4.4 Habits That Reveal the Love*

#### *Long hours & immersion*

---

[7] See: Al-Munjid, Muhammad. Makānat al-Kutub ʿInd ʿUlamāʾ al-Muslimīn (The Status of Books Among Muslim Scholars). Published December 24, 2011.

[8] See: See: Al-ʿImrān, ʿAlī. *Al-Mushawwiq ilā al-Qirāʾah wa Ṭalab al-ʿIlm* (The One Who Inspires Toward Reading and Seeking Knowledge), p. 38

This dīn that has reached us was not carried by ease and comfort, but by the countless sleepless nights of our scholars. Their love for knowledge burned brighter than the lamps by which they read, their eyes weary yet their hearts alive. Page after page, hour after hour, they gave their nights to learning and preserving, so that we might inherit this treasure of guidance. What follows are glimpses of that devotion.

- **Imām al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī** (d. 642): Reading into the night, book upon his chest until sleep took him.
- **Al-Ḥasan al-Lu'lu'ī** (d. 819) said: "For forty years, I never rose nor lay down without a book upon my chest."[9]
- **Al-Jāḥiẓ** (d. 868), the great prose master, lived as a symbol of devotion to books. *He would rent the shops of copyists to read through the available manuscripts at night*, pore over scraps of discarded paper, and buy them when others mocked him. He replied to those who made fun of his keen nature: "In these scraps are things that exist nowhere else. You are ignorant of their worth." Even his death came while surrounded by towering stacks of books.[10]
- **Imām al-Mundhirī** (d. 1258): His student said, "Whenever I awoke at night, I found him still reading by the lamp."
- It is reported about some of the Aslaf that they would read even while lying down, and the book would slip from one of their hands once, twice, or more—yet they would return to it and pick it up again. Sleep would overcome them, and still they would return to it and pick it up.
- Some early scholars used to stipulate a condition, when invited to a

---

[9] See: Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, Abū ʿUmar Yūsuf ibn ʿAbd Allāh. *Jāmiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm wa Faḍlihi* (The Comprehensive Explanation of Knowledge and Its Virtue), Chapter: *On the Virtue of Looking into Books and Praising Care for Notebooks*. 2/1231

[10] See: Khibesh, Hamid. *Ḥayātuhum maʿa al-Kutub* (Their Life with Books). Retrieved from https://ar.islamway.net/article/80287/حياتهم مع الكتب

gathering, that a space be provided for them to place a book and read from it.

---

At times, the edge of one's turban would catch fire from the lamp placed before him—without him even noticing due to being engrossed in books—until the flame reached his hair.

---

- Al-Wazīr al-Qifṭī, in Inbāh al-Ruwāt (vol. 3), mentions in the biography of **Abū al-Qāsim ibn Abī Manṣūr al-Naḥwī al-Ḥalabī**—known as Ibn al-Ḥabrānī (d. 628 AH), whom he had personally known and accompanied: "He was deeply devoted to extracting benefits from the pages of books, persisting in reading day and night, and committing to memory portions of what he encountered. He reported from one of his neighbors who said: 'I saw Ibn al-Ḥabrānī the grammarian in the summertime, rising during the last part of the night to ascend his rooftop, where he would light a lamp in a spot protected from the wind and sit for long hours every night reading. Neither heat nor cold ever distracted him from study and the pursuit of knowledge.'"

- **Shaykh al-Albānī** (d. 1999): Twelve-hour stretches in the Ẓāhiriyyah Library; often eating there; eventually given a key to come early and stay late.

- **Shaykh Dhiyāb ibn Saʿd Āl Ḥamdān al-Ghāmidī** (b. 1966), may Allah preserve him, writes in his precious work Ṣiyānat al-Kutub: "These corrections and etiquettes were not confined to a single book or locked behind a gate… Rather, with Allah's grace, they were the fruit of long reading and extended study over more than twenty-five fruitful years—years in which I lived as one in love with books, passionately so, constantly collecting them. With this love and desire, my hunger for them only grew, my passion for them only deepened. By Allah, I have with books a state known only to my closest family. If you saw me, you would find me and my books as

one body: I suffer with their sufferings, rejoice at their safety, and grieve at their damage. Sometimes I even groan at their afflictions. My love for certain books has reached the point that I know more about them than about my own children."

### *Books Over Socialization*

Books were not for our scholars mere objects to be read—they were companions, confidants, and protectors from the distractions of idle gatherings. Many of the Salaf preferred the company of books over unnecesssary socialization, finding in them intimacy, wisdom, and delight that no gathering of people could match. The examples below illustrate this point:

- It is narrated that one of the caliphs once summoned a scholar to attend him.[11] The scholar excused himself, saying that he was already in the company of wise men, conversing with them. Later, when the caliph learned that he had been alone, he reproached him and asked: "Who were those with you?" The scholar replied in verse:

  *We have companions whose conversation never wearies us,*
  *Intelligent, trustworthy, in absence and in presence.*
  *They grant us knowledge of what has passed,*
  *And wisdom, refinement, honor, and leadership.*
  *No backbiting do we fear, nor bad companionship,*
  *Nor do we dread from them a tongue or a hand (that could harm).*

  Who were these companions? The books.

- **Imām Ibn al-Mubārak** (d. 797) was once asked why he did not sit with his friends after prayer. He replied:[12]

---

[11] See: Al-Munjid, Muhammad. Makānat al-Kutub ʿInd ʿUlamāʾ al-Muslimīn (The Status of Books Among Muslim Scholars). Published December 24, 2011.

[12] See: Al-Jarallah, Abdullah bin Jarallah bin Ibrahim. *Ahamiyyat al-Qirāʾah wa Fawāʾiduhā* (The Importance of Reading and Its Benefits), Vol. 1, p. 14. Jāmiʿ al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah

إني إذا كنت في المنزل جالست أصحاب محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم

*"When I am at home, I sit with the Companions of Muḥammad ﷺ, May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him"*

—meaning, through his books. On another occasion, when reproached for spending so much time in solitude, he said: "How can I feel lonely, when I am with the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions?" His contemporary, **Shafīq ibn Ibrāhīm** (d. 811), once asked him why he avoided their gatherings. Ibn al-Mubārak replied:

أذهب فأجلس مع التابعين والصحابة

*I go and sit with the Tābiʿīn and the Companions.*

He was asked: "And where do you find them?"
He replied:

أذهب فأنظر في علمي فأدرك آثارهم وأعمالهم. ما أصنع بكم؟ أنتم تجلسون تغتابون الناس

*"I go to my books, in which I find the traces and deeds of the Companions and the Tābiʿīn. As for you, you sit and backbite people."*

- One scholar, when asked: "Who keeps you company?" pointed to his books and said: "These." When asked, "From among the people?" he replied: "The people who are in them."
- Later scholars spoke in the same spirit. **Al-Maqrīzī** (d. 1442) versified:

*My soul has entirely turned away from frivolity,*
*And wearied of meeting people, even the great among them.*
*My sole concern, by Allah's grace, has become knowledge,*
*Whose benefits preoccupy me and free me from sorrow.*

- **Imam Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī's** (d. 742 AD) wife once said: "By Allah, these books are harder on me than three co-wives."[13]

---

[13] See: Al-ʿImrān, ʿAlī. *Al-Mushawwiq ilā al-Qirāʾah wa Ṭalab al-ʿIlm* (The One Who Inspires Toward Reading and Seeking Knowledge), p. 59

- **Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī** (d. 745H) versified the same sentiment:

  *I freed my soul from seeking solace among men,*
  *When I despaired of clever folk, I found repose.*
  *Now I sit at home alone, seeing no one,*
  *My thoughts and my books – they are my companions.*

- The verses below capture the very state of our scholars, as described above.
  *An inkwell that keeps me company by day*
  *Is dearer to me than the company of a friend;*
  *A bundle of parchment in my house*
  *Dearer than a sack of flour.*

Thus, for the seekers of knowledge, books were not cold and lifeless pages; they were living voices, faithful companions, and guides to wisdom. In them they found what social gatherings could not offer: safety from gossip, nourishment for the mind, and intimacy for the soul.

### *Reading despite circumstances*

Among the remarkable qualities of our aslāf was that their love of reading did not falter even in times of illness. Ibn al-Qayyim (رحمه الله) relates:[14]

"I knew a man who was stricken with severe headaches and fever, yet he kept a book at his bedside. Whenever he felt relief, he would read; when pain overcame him, he would put it aside. Then, when the pain lessened, he would return to reading again."

The same is reported about Imām Ibn Taymiyyah (رحمه الله), who remained engaged in the pursuit of knowledge even during sickness. From among the early generations, it is narrated that some would be on their very deathbeds, moments away from leaving this world, yet when a visitor came to them, they would seize the opportunity for learning and

---

[14] See: Al-ʿImrān, ʿAlī. *Al-Mushawwiq ilā al-Qirāʾah wa Ṭalab al-ʿIlm* (The One Who Inspires Toward Reading and Seeking Knowledge), p. 38

*mudhākarah* (mutual study).

Words fall short of conveying the respect due to such towering figures — for their service to the dīn, for their truthfulness, and for their unwavering sincerity in this cause. Their devotion was such that even pain and frailty could not sever their bond with knowledge.

### *On the move & at all times*

Our scholars did not wait for the "perfect" time or place to study. For them, every moment was an opportunity, and every setting could become a place of learning. Whether walking in the streets, traveling on the road, or even pitching their tents on a journey, their books were never far from them. They studied on the move, at all times, with a devotion that allowed no pause in their pursuit of knowledge. The following examples illustrate their exemplary love for reading:

- **Imām Thaʿlab** (d. 903)*:* In the biography of the renowned grammarian Imam Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā, known as Thaʿlab, Ibn Khallikān (d. 1282), in *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān* (vol. 3), wrote: "The cause of his death was that he left the mosque on Friday after ʿAṣr prayer. He had been afflicted with deafness and could only hear with difficulty. A book was in his hand, and he was reading it as he walked along the road. A horse struck him, throwing him into a pit. He was pulled out in a very injured state, carried home in that condition, groaning from pain in his head—and he died the following day."[15]
- **Sayyid Ṣalāḥ ibn Aḥmad al-Muʾayyidī al-Yamānī** (d. 1048 AH): Imam Al-Shawkānī, in *Al-Badr al-Ṭāliʿ* (vol. 3), said about him: "He was among the wonders and rarities of his time. His entire lifespan was only twenty-nine years, yet he attained a substantial share in every discipline. In that brief period, he authored numerous beneficial works and unique insights." Al-Shawkānī then listed several of his writings and continued: "When he traveled, the first

[15] Ibid, p45

tent to be pitched was the tent of books. Once it was set up, he would enter it and spread out his books, while the servants arranged the other tents. He would spend the entire night immersed in study—reading, refining, and articulating—with a soundness of taste and discernment"[16]

- **Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī** (d. 1071): Known to walk the streets reading from an open book.

### *Discipline to protect time*

Our scholars guarded their time with devotion, turning even fleeting moments into treasures of learning. For them, every breath was too precious to waste away from knowledge. Let us now some glimpses of how they lived this truth in their daily lives.

- Imam Al-Sakhāwī, mentioned in Al-Ḍawʾ al-Lāmiʿ (vol. 2), in the biography of **Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-ʿUmari al-Ṣaghānī** (d. 854 AH):[17] "He was an eminent scholar, distinguished in jurisprudence, the two foundational sciences, and Arabic—versed in many disciplines, meticulous in documentation, and deeply devoted to reading and selecting texts. I was informed by Abū al-Khayr ibn ʿAbd al-Qawī, who said: 'I have known him for over fifty years, and never once entered upon him except that I found him either reading or writing.
- **Imām al-Bukhārī** (d. 870): Imām al-Bukhārī often forgot to eat; food placed before him would be taken away untouched, so absorbed was he in his reading.[18]
- **Imām al-Nawawī** (d. 1277): He disciplined his life around reading and writing, sleeping upright, eating lightly, and avoiding foods

---

[16] Ibid, p. 44

[17] See: Al-ʿImrān, ʿAlī. *Al-Mushawwiq ilā al-Qirāʾah wa Ṭalab al-ʿIlm* (The One Who Inspires Toward Reading and Seeking Knowledge), p. 42

[18] See: Al-Munjid, Muhammad. *Makānat al-Kutub ʿInd ʿUlamāʾ al-Muslimīn* (The Status of Books Among Muslim Scholars). Published December 24, 2011.

that induced drowsiness—so as not to waste even moments of learning.

- **Imam Ibn Ḥajar** (d. 1449) said, "I am astonished at anyone who sits idle without study." (al-Jawāhir wa-l-Durar, 1/170)
- Imam Ibn al-Qayyim relates from his teachers of the **Ibn Taymiyyah family** that even at the threshold of the lavatory, a grandson would be told: "*Read aloud so I can listen.*" Love of knowledge spilled into every corner of life.

It was to ensure that even that little time is not wasted and he could benefit from the books.

## 3.5 Grief at the loss of books

The attachment of scholars to their books was not merely material but deeply spiritual. For many, their libraries were extensions of their very lives, repositories of years of effort, and companions in knowledge. Thus, when calamity struck and books were lost, the grief they felt was profound — sometimes equal to, or even surpassing, the loss of wealth or family. The following examples illustrate this point.[19]

- **Shaykh ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir** R.A. (d. 1277) lost both his son and his collection of books in the tragedy of Baghdad. He would say:

في قلبي حسرتان : ولدي وكتبي

"*Two griefs dwell in my heart: my son, and my books.*"

- **Shaykh ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Sanānī** R.A. (d. 1339) personally authored and copied a large number of books. In the year 1222 AH, devastating rains destroyed many houses in his town of

[19] For details, see: Al-Shuwairekh, Fahd bin Abdulaziz bin Abdullah. لذة قراءة الكتب [*The Pleasure of Reading Books*]. Saaid.net. Retrieved from https://saaid.org/Doat/alshwairek/26.htm

ʿUnayzah, including his own. When some of his treasured books were ruined, he lamented:

والله إن تلف هذه الكتب النفيسة, معادل عندي ما تلف من الأموال وغيرها

*"By Allah, the loss of these precious books is to me equal to the loss of wealth – and more besides. (i.e. the loss of books is causing me much more grief than the loss of wealth)"*

- **Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn al-Mulaqqin** R.A. (d. 1401) owned an immense library, much of which was consumed by fire later in his life. Afterward, his state was never the same due to this grief.

## 3.6 Creating a Culture of reading and loving books:

### *3.6.1 Cultural Initiatives:*

The programs we see today—reading campaigns, book fairs, literary contests, and countless official or voluntary projects across the Muslim world—are noble and praiseworthy. They remind us that reading is not merely an individual habit but a cultural engine that can shape societies.

Yet if we look back, we find that initiatives and drives to promote reading are not something new. The aslāf themselves cultivated a vibrant culture around books: they established great libraries, created systems of waqf to preserve and circulate knowledge, encouraged the copying and sharing of manuscripts, and opened their private collections to students. Their 'initiatives' were not seasonal campaigns, but deeply rooted traditions of valuing books and making them accessible to all.

Thus, for our modern efforts to bear lasting fruit, they must draw light from those early examples. Elevating books to the rank of priority and necessity—just as the salaf did—is the truest stone that will stir ripples in stagnant waters. Without such roots, no cultural movement can endure.

For whatever grows without firm roots… will never endure.

### *3.6.2 Sharing and Circulating Books*

The culture of books among the Salaf was not confined to personal study and private collections. It also manifested in the practice of lending, sharing, and circulating books—a hallmark of scholarly life.

Not everyone who collected books was an avid reader. For some, simply owning manuscripts was a way of belonging to the noble tradition of loving books. Others, however, were bound to their texts with a deep personal connection—studying them closely under their beloved shuyūkh, or painstakingly copying them by hand after weeks of effort. Their reluctance to part with such treasures is easy to understand. Yet among the true seekers of knowledge, sharing books was regarded as a noble act, while hoarding them was repeatedly condemned in sermons and counsels.

**Imam Al-Zuhrī** (d. 742), may Allah have mercy on him, warned:[20]

إياكم وغلول الحديث

*"Beware of treachery with knowledge."*

When asked what he meant, he replied:

حبس الكتب

*"Withholding books."*

Similarly, Imām al-Shāfiʿī (d. 820), may Allah have mercy on him, wrote to Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan R.A. (d. 805):[21]

"Knowledge forbids its people from preventing it from reaching its rightful seekers."

---

[20] For details, see: Al-'Iraqi, Zayn al-Din 'Abd al-Rahim ibn al-Husayn. *Al-Taqyīd wa al-Īḍāḥ Sharḥ Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ* [Explanation of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's Introduction to Hadith]. Page 220.

[21] For details, see: Khibesh, Hamid. نماذج من تاريخ المسلمين في حب القراءة [*Examples from the History of Muslims in Their Love for Reading*].

Borrowing and lending books thus carried with it mutual responsibilities. The borrower was expected to safeguard the book, return it without delay, and show gratitude to the lender—even if only through sincere supplication.

This culture of circulation enriched the intellectual climate, while also creating its challenges. The competition to acquire rare works gave rise to book hunters who scoured markets for valuable manuscripts. As book markets flourished, scholars grappled with balancing two concerns: the sin of withholding knowledge by locking away books, and the risk of losing or misusing them at the hands of the untrustworthy.

### *3.6.3 Libraries: Storehouses of Knowledge*

From the earliest centuries, Muslims realized that books and libraries were the very lifeblood of knowledge and civilization. A library was more than shelves of paper—it was a house of wisdom, a sanctuary for the mind, and a garden of the spirit. To walk into one was to enter a world of discovery.

#### *Private Libraries in the Islamic Tradition*

Across our history, scholars and book lovers maintained vast private libraries—sometimes holding thousands upon thousands of manuscripts long before the printing press. These collections were built through travel, copying, purchase, endowments, and years of careful curation.

For example, consider the personal library of Imām Ibn al-Qayyim (رحمه الله), whose vastness we touched upon earlier. His collection encompassed abundant, valuable, and rare works across many disciplines. After his passing, much of this library remained within the family. His sons preserved a large portion, while his nephew, ʿImād al-Dīn Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, acquired many of the precious volumes and never withheld them from being borrowed. In this way, Ibn al-Qayyim left his children the best of provisions, and for the Ummah he left a living legacy

through the continued circulation of his books.[22]

### *Early Models of Great Public Libraries*

Beyond private libraries, there were also great public libraries that flourished with knowledge and activity. The following are some examples:

- **Bayt al-Ḥikmah in Baghdad**: Founded under the ʿAbbāsids, it gathered translations of Greek, Persian, and Indian works alongside original contributions in medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and theology. It became a beacon of research, debate, and creativity—hosting scholars like al-Kindī and al-Khwārizmī.

- **The Umayyad Library of Córdoba**: Under al-Ḥakam al-Mustanṣir, this library reportedly held more than 400,000 volumes and attracted seekers of knowledge from across al-Andalus and Europe. It symbolized how books were treasures worth collecting, copying, and preserving.

- **Dār al-ʿIlm in Cairo (Fatimid era):** Founded in 1004/1005 CE by the Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh, this institution began as a great library and, within the same year, was expanded into a state-sponsored university. It was far more than a repository of books; under al-Ḥākim's patronage it became a vibrant center of scholarship, providing not only access to a vast collection but also free paper, pens, ink, and inkstands to all who wished to study. Here, scholars engaged in diverse disciplines—Qurʾān, ḥadīth, logic, medicine, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and more. For over a century, it stood as one of the intellectual landmarks of Cairo. Its legacy reflects how libraries of that era were conceived as institutions serving the whole community, not private hoards of knowledge.
- **Dār al-ʿIlm of Banū ʿAmmār in Tripoli:** Established in the mid-11th

[22] See: Jamāl b. Muḥammad al-Sayyid, *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah wa-Juhūduhu fī Khidmat al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*, 1/173–176

century, it became one of the most celebrated centers of learning in the region. Historical sources describe it as housing an immense collection of books—some reports estimating close to a million volumes, though likely symbolic of its vastness. Tragically, it was destroyed during the Crusader conquest of Tripoli in 502 AH / 1109 CE.

### *The Spirit Behind These Libraries*

What mattered the most to our forefathers was not the sheer number of volumes in their libraries, but the spirit of reverence for knowledge they had. It was this spirit that gave rise to the great marvels of learning we have just seen. Libraries were not confined to private collections or grand public institutions alone; they were woven into the very fabric of Muslim society. Mosques, schools, and even palaces often housed adjoining libraries, ensuring that books were always within reach of scholars and students. Indeed, it was rare to find a major mosque or madrasa without its own library, and whole communities took pride in these centers as living symbols of devotion to knowledge.

### *Takeaway for Today*

If our predecessors could dedicate fortunes, entire buildings, and even their lives to the love of books, what excuse do we have today, when libraries are within easy reach and digital knowledge is at our fingertips? Reviving the culture of libraries—public, school, or home libraries—is one way to honor their legacy and rekindle our own passion for reading.

## *3.6.4 Waqfs of books:*

The flourishing culture of libraries in Muslim lands was not sustained by individual passion alone. What truly allowed knowledge to thrive and endure was the institution of the **waqf (endowment)**. Through waqfs, private collections and public libraries alike were secured for future generations, transforming personal devotion into communal benefit.

To dedicate one's library as a waqf was seen as a form of **ṣadaqah**

**jāriyah**—an ongoing charity that continued to educate and inspire long after the donor's death.

The result was remarkable: entire libraries attached to mosques, schools, hospitals, and zawāyā were supported through endowed funds that covered copying, binding, and caretaking. Some collections became so well-stocked that students no longer needed to buy books. The grammarian **Abū Ḥayyān**, for example, would say: "*May Allah grant you a mind to live by. As for me, whatever book I want, I find it in the waqf library.*"

Sadly, many of these endowments later fell victim to neglect, sale, and plunder—especially in times of decline. Today, countless manuscripts once endowed for the Muslim community rest in foreign libraries and museums. Yet their very survival is testimony to the scale of our ancestors' vision: they built not for themselves, but for an ummah—and for centuries to come.

### *3.6.5 Government Patronage: Rulers and Their Love for Books*

The thriving culture of books and knowledge in Muslim history was never the outcome of a solitary effort or a single initiative. It was the fruit of many forces working in concert: passionate individuals building private collections; communal networks copying and circulating manuscripts; endowments (awqāf) that safeguarded access across generations; and scholars who devoted their lives to reading and teaching. Added to this was princely patronage which—*whatever the rulers' other shortcomings*—left a lasting service to civilization by recognizing that the strength of their states rested on the strength of knowledge.

From the earliest centuries of Islam, caliphs and sultans understood that supporting books and scholarship was part of their responsibility toward the Ummah and an essential pillar of governance.

- **Al-Manṣūr (d. 158H/775CE).** The second ʿAbbāsid caliph laid early foundations for scholarly exchange. Fascinated by astronomy, medicine, and logic, he commissioned translations from Persian and

Indian sources. Most notably, the Sanskrit *Siddhānta* was translated into Arabic as the *Zīj al-Sindhind* by Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Fazārī. Such initiatives marked the beginning of a systematic engagement with the sciences of earlier civilizations.

- **Al-Maʾmūn (d. 218H/833CE).** His reign witnessed the flowering of the Bayt al-Ḥikmah (House of Wisdom) in Baghdad. More than a library, it was a state-sponsored academy and translation bureau, as highlighted earlier. Under his patronage, leading scholars gathered to translate, study, and expand upon the sciences of earlier civilizations. Among them was Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq (d. 260H / 873CE), master translator of Greek medicine and philosophy, along with his son Isḥāq b. Ḥunayn (d. 298H / 910CE). Thābit b. Qurra (d. 288H / 901CE), the great mathematician and astronomer, also worked under the patronage of the ʿAbbāsids, contributing original research alongside translations. Qusṭā b. Lūqā (d. 300H / 912CE) rendered works on medicine, philosophy, and mechanics, while al-Kindī (d. 260H / 873CE), who was also known as "the philosopher of the Arabs," drew upon this translated heritage to produce pioneering contributions in philosophy, mathematics, and optics. This patronage not only preserved Greek, Persian, and Indian sciences but also created an environment where Muslim scholars advanced them in original ways—developing new achievements in astronomy, algebra, medicine, and philosophy.
- **Al-Ḥakam II of Córdoba (d. 366H / 976CE).** In al-Andalus, al-Ḥakam II displayed a deeply personal passion for books. For the Umayyad Library of Córdoba, he employed agents across Muslim lands to acquire manuscripts at great expense. He himself read, annotated, and corrected texts. His court also sponsored translations, such as Dioscorides' *Materia Medica*, and he commissioned works documenting geography and natural sciences.
- **Al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh (d. 411H / 1021CE).** The Fatimid ruler established **Dār al-ʿIlm in Cairo** in 395H / 1005CE as explained earlier and sponsored a lot of intellectual activities and teaching at this centre.

- **Nūr al-Dīn Maḥmūd Zangī (d. 569H / 1174CE).** The Zangid ruler of Syria and Iraq established numerous schools and libraries, most famously the Nūriyya Madrasa in Damascus (founded 1167). Through his waqf endowments he provided books, promoted ḥadīth study, and made knowledge widely accessible. His efforts laid the intellectual and spiritual groundwork for the revival that followed under Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn.

**Figure:** Mausoleum of Nūr al-Dīn Zangi

- **Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (d. 589H / 1193CE).** Renowned as the liberator of Jerusalem, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn was also a patron of learning. He re-endowed al-Azhar as a Sunni institution, founded madrasas across Egypt and Syria, and endowed vast libraries. His vision was that the defense of the Ummah required cultivating inner strength through knowledge as much as outward strength through arms.
- **Al-Mustanṣir (d. 640H / 1242CE).** The Abbasid caliph al-Mustanṣir established the Mustanṣiriyya Madrasa in Baghdad, inaugurated in 631H / 1233CE. It was one of the most ambitious scholarly complexes of its age, teaching all four Sunni schools of law along with the rational sciences. Its library was vast and carefully endowed, and the institution also included a hospital and

pharmacy, reflecting an integrated vision of education and public service.

The history of Muslim libraries and the rulers who supported them offers a powerful reminder for today. Knowledge thrives not only on the passion of scholars but also on the resources and protection that leadership provides. If rulers and decision-makers wish to leave a legacy that outlives palaces, armies, and wealth, they must invest in books, libraries, and institutions of learning. To neglect this duty is to leave scholars struggling unaided, and to risk the intellectual decline of the ummah itself.

## 3.7 Conclusion

The pages of this chapter have taken us through the intimate world of our scholars and predecessors, where books were not mere possessions, but companions of the soul, guides of the mind, and lanterns of the heart. We witnessed how they sacrificed wealth, time, and comfort for the joy of acquiring and reading books; how they immersed themselves in their pages at all hours; and how they preferred their companionship over gatherings of idle talk.

We then saw how this individual love blossomed into a collective culture: libraries that stood as fortresses of knowledge, the waqf system that kept books circulating for generations, and rulers who—despite their shortcomings—recognized their duty to strengthen the Ummah by strengthening its foundations of learning. Together, these forces created a civilization known across history as a "nation of books."

For us today, the lesson is clear: books remain the lifeblood of renewal. We cannot allow them to be reduced to ornaments on our shelves or spectacles at fairs. We must rekindle in our homes, our schools, our institutions, and our societies the same love and seriousness that animated the salaf. Let our private lives echo with the rustling of pages; let our public life honor libraries as centers of revival; and let our rulers and institutions never leave scholars unaided or in need of resources.

Only then will the Ummah recover the strength that books once gave it, and only then will we pass on to future generations not just information, but light.

# 4. Books Peek Through

Gulzar

*Published in the August 2018 edition of Tarjuman-ul-Quran*

This poem by the renowned dramatist and lyricist Gulzar (b. 1934, Dina) delights when read, but stings when pondered. In it, bitter truths are expressed with rare elegance.

It is set down here in writing so that the reader may not only read it, but also truly feel it. [We have presented it in Urdu first followed by its English translation.]

کتابیں جھانکتی ہیں بند الماری کے شیشوں سے،

بڑی حسرت سے تکتی ہیں،

مہینوں اب ملاقاتیں نہیں ہوتیں

جو شامیں ان کی صحبت میں کٹا کرتی تھیں،

اب اکثر، گزر جاتی ہیں کمپیوٹر کے پردوں پر

بڑی بے چین رہتی ہیں کتابیں

انھیں اب نیند میں چلنے کی عادت ہو گئی ہے۔

جو قدریں وہ سناتی تھیں

کہ جن کے سیل کبھی مرتے نہیں تھے

وہ قدریں اب نظر آتی نہیں گھر میں

جو رشتے وہ بناتی تھیں

وہ سارے اُدھڑے اُدھڑے ہیں۔

کوئی صفحہ پلٹتا ہوں تو اک سسکی نکلتی ہے

کئی لفظوں کے معنی گر پڑے ہیں

بنا پتوں کے سوکھے ٹُنڈ لگتے ہیں وہ سب الفاظ،

جن پر اب کوئی معنی نہیں اُگتے۔

بہت سی اصطلاحیں ہیں،

جو مٹی کے سکوروں کی طرح بکھری پڑی ہیں،

گلاسوں نے انھیں متروک کر ڈالا

زباں پر ذائقہ آتا تھا جو صفحہ پلٹنے کا

اب انگلی کلک کرنے سے

بس اِک جھپکی گزرتی ہے

بہت کچھ تہہ بہ تہہ کھلتا چلا جاتا ہے پردے پر،

کتابوں سے جو ذاتی رابطہ تھا کٹ گیا ہے

کبھی سینے پر رکھ کر لیٹ جاتے تھے،

کبھی گودی میں لیتے تھے

کبھی گھٹنوں کو اپنے رحل کی صورت بنا کر

نیم سجدے میں پڑھا کرتے تھے، چھوتے تھے جبیں سے

وہ سارا علم تو ملتا رہے گا آیندہ بھی

مگر وہ جو کتابوں میں ملا کرتے تھے سوکھے پھول

ان کا کیا ہو گا؟

Books gaze out from behind the glass of closed cupboards,
watching with longing—
for months now, no meetings have taken place.

The evenings once spent in their company
now slip away before the glow of computer screens.

The books are restless still;
they have learned to wander in their sleep.

The values they once recited—
streams that never ran dry—
are no longer visible within the home.

The relationships they once wove
lie frayed and unraveling.

When I turn a page, a soft sob escapes;
the meanings of many words have fallen away.

They stand like leafless, withered stumps—
those words from which no new meanings now sprout.

So many expressions lie scattered,

like shards of earthen cups,
abandoned,
as glass vessels made them obsolete.

Once the tongue savored
the taste of turning a page;
now, with the click of a finger—
in the blink of an eye—
layer upon layer unfolds upon a screen.

Yet the intimate bond with books has been cut.

Once we would lie with them resting on our chest,
or cradle them gently in our lap,
or shape our knees into a lectern,
reading in half-prostration, touching them to our forehead.

The knowledge will still be there in times to come—
but what of the dried flowers
that once slipped from between their pages?

Section 2

# Reading in Islamic Movements

(Chapter 5 to 7)

# 5. The Reading Habit — A Tehreeki Perspective

*Translation of an article by Professor Dr. Anis Ahmad; Published in the March 2014 edition of Tarjuman-ul-Quran*

**Note from the editor:**

This chapter forms the backbone of the first part of the book. It emphasizes the vital role of reading in the life of tehreeki organizations and workers, showing how neglect of reading and intellectual growth leads to stagnation and blocks the path to success. For Islamic movements, as for their early pioneers, reading must remain an integral discipline of the present workforce.

Dr. Anis highlights key areas that demand our attention. Foremost is the Qur'an—not as a text to be recited merely for reward, but as a living book to be implemented for transforming society and uprooting evil. Next is the Sirah of the Prophet ﷺ, to be studied in its true spirit—not as a collection of stories, but as practical guidance for our da'wah and mission. Alongside this comes fiqh, enabling us to align our personal and collective lives with the Shari'ah.

Equally important is the study of contemporary challenges and the attempts to address them: engaging with modern currents of thought, examining the strategies of Islamic movements today, and learning from both their successes and shortcomings. Reading, therefore, is not confined to re-connecting with our foundational tehreeki literature—though that remains its backbone. It must also foster wider intellectual engagement and stimulate the creation of new works that can awaken and guide the minds and hearts of our time.

## 5.1 Dawah through literature:

If members of the Islamic movement today were to look back fifty years, they would see how books once held a central place in the methodology and spirit of daʿwah. Many who kept their distance from the movement—some out of sheer opposition for the sake of opposition to its leaders and its call, and others due to their government employment—could not help but be influenced if they happened, by mere chance, to read one of its books. Some, through just such an "accident," were so deeply moved that they abandoned government service and chose to join the movement as ordinary workers.

The power of these books and writings did not stem merely from literary style; it stemmed from the fact that they conveyed the truth, expressed in plain words without pretension, compromise, or extremism.

Undoubtedly, the sincerity of the authors and their devotion purely for the sake of Allah played a major part in this. Yet beyond all doubt, this quality of books and writing remains an indisputable factor in the spread and acceptance of the dawah of the Islamic Movement.

## 5.2 The first and the foremost book that should be the companion of every tehreeki worker:

If we reflect, we find that in the divinely revealed method of da'wah, the heavenly scriptures have always played a central role. The call toward the Qur'an was a call to study this greatest Book with care, to grasp its meaning, and to put its teachings into practice. For this reason, it is declared again and again:

فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ ٢٦ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ ٢٧ لِمَن شَآءَ مِنكُمْ أَن يَسْتَقِيمَ ٢٨

*So, what ˹other˺ path would you take? Surely this ˹Quran˺ is only a reminder to the whole world— to whoever of you wills to take the Straight Way.* (Al-Takwir 81:26–28).

In other words: Where are you straying? Come back to this Book! It is an

admonition for all humanity, for every one of you who seeks the straight path. And elsewhere it is said:

فَمَن شَآءَ ذَكَرَهُۥ ١٢ فِى صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ ١٣ مَّرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍۭ ١٤ بِأَيْدِى سَفَرَةٍ ١٥ كِرَامٍۭ بَرَرَةٍ ١٦

*"So let whoever wills be mindful of it. It is ˹written˺ on pages held in honour – highly esteemed, purified – by the hands of angel-scribes, honourable and virtuous."* (Abasa 80:12–16).

While stating the importance of al-Kitab in many places, it was taught that:

وَرَتِّلِ ٱلْقُرْءَانَ تَرْتِيلًا ٤ إِنَّا سَنُلْقِى عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا ٥

"*And recite the Quran ˹properly˺ in a measured way. ˹For˺ We will soon send upon you a weighty revelation*." (Al-Muzzammil 73:4–5).

One should not recite it hastily or in undue speed, for the true purpose is not merely to gain reward, but to understand this Book of guidance and put it into practice in the affairs of life. For this reason it is repeatedly emphasized that, since this Book is guidance, it has been made simple and easy so that even a common seeker of truth may benefit from it:

فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرْنَٰهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ

"*And We have made (this Scripture) easy in your language only that they may heed."* (Al-Dukhan 44:58).

To become distant from this great Book and to weaken one's bond with it not only leads a person away from guidance in worldly life, but also results in deprivation and severe accountability in the Hereafter:

وَقَالَ ٱلرَّسُولُ يَٰرَبِّ إِنَّ قَوْمِى ٱتَّخَذُوا۟ هَٰذَا ٱلْقُرْءَانَ مَهْجُورًا

*"The Rasool will say: "O my Rabb! Surely my people come to regard this Qur'an as something [that ought to be] discarded!"* (Al-Furqan 25:30).

A close bond with the Noble Qur'an and continual reflection upon it is the foremost demand of the movement's da'wah. It can be said with full confidence that the movement is, in essence, a call to translate the Qur'an into practice—that is, to implement its guidance in every aspect of life.

Alongside this, to remain connected with the movement and to keep one's thinking fresh, it is essential to study those writings that present thought grounded in the Qur'an and Sunnah and that point toward Islamic solutions to the problems of our age.

## 5.3 The Pitfall of False Satisfaction from Cursory Reading

It is a serious mistake to assume that a worker—who at the outset of his acquaintance with the movement merely read a few pamphlets and joined, or skimmed through the membership syllabus and advanced over time to become an office-bearer—has thereby attained adequate knowledge of the Dīn, or that such cursory reading was sufficient for this purpose. [Brief and superficial study can never substitute for deep and sound understanding.]

For the movement to remain vibrant, it is essential that every worker cultivate a dynamic outlook. He must not only be familiar with the foundational books but also possess a thorough acquaintance with the primary Islamic sources. The movement's call is not merely to display strength and numbers in the streets, but to demonstrate the superiority of Islamic thought—its freshness and its ability to address contemporary challenges.

## 5.4 Which areas to include in the study

### *5.4.1 Deeper understanding of the Quran:*

The above demands a continual deepening of knowledge of the Noble Qur'an. If one has read *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān* from beginning to end, then to truly grasp its distinctiveness it becomes necessary to study at least three or four other modern tafaseer, and to observe how the Qur'an's comprehensive and practical teachings can be applied in today's world.

### 5.4.2 *Connection with Sirah:*

He must study not only the Noble Qur'an but also the blessed Sirah of the Prophet ﷺ—looking to it for guidance on the issues of our time, and considering what changes this study should bring about in his personal, family, social, economic, political, and educational life.

**Note from the editor:**

Considering its importance, the entire next chapter is devoted to outlining the proper methodology for studying the Sīrah and to highlighting how one can avoid common mistakes in grasping its essence and central message.

### 5.4.3 *Fiqh of halal and haram:*

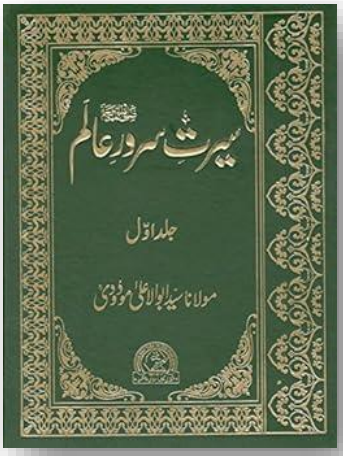
He should possess at least enough knowledge of fiqh to distinguish between what is halal and haram, and to guide people in the basic acts of worship and social dealings.

### 5.4.4 *Methods of dawah driven from the Sirah:*

A da'i is not merely a fiery speaker who can out-argue others; his real task is not to defeat an opponent, but to win him over—to draw him closer, and to attract those aligned with the opposing camp into his own community. The wisdom of religion has never been—nor can it ever be—to increase the number of adversaries, or to wound them with sharp words for one's own satisfaction. Rather, the demand of religion is that those who were yesterday's enemies be turned, through gentle words, wisdom, and love, into intimate friends (*walīyun ḥamīm*).

The da'i's speech and conduct should be such that even a petal of a flower could split the heart of a diamond. This is possible only when the study of the blessed Sirah is approached with the aim of understanding the methods of da'wah, the example of steadfastness and patience, and the wisdom behind the Prophet's ﷺ call.

It is worth examining: those workers and office-bearers who have been associated with the movement for 10, 20, or even 30 years—how much have they increased their knowledge and understanding of the blessed Sīrah during this time? Apart from *Sīrat-i-Sarwar-i-ʿĀlam* ﷺ [of Maulana Maududi], what other book have they read in the past two years? And even with regard to *Sīrat-i-Sarwar-i-ʿĀlam* ﷺ itself, have they studied it in the manner it truly deserves to be studied?




### 5.4.5 *Islamic movememnt and the challenges of the current age:*

There is also a need, alongside Islamic literature, to study with care the ideas, concepts, and movements of our own time, and to understand the intellectual and civilizational challenges confronting Islam and the movement. Only then can the capacity—both scholarly and practical—to meet those challenges be developed. This is possible only when both workers and leadership remain informed in these areas and do not content themselves with the intellectual legacy of the past.

## 5.5 Inevitable need for intellectual growth:

> The first step in the movement's growth and success is tied to the intellectual growth of the da'i himself. Without ongoing study, the mind becomes incapable of discovering new perspectives and alternative solutions. We then risk becoming trapped in the grip of tradition (riawayat)—reduced to a rule-bound organization that follows constitutions and bylaws but remains unaware of the spirit of the constitution and the wisdom behind the bylaws. That is stagnation. That is fossilization. That is reactionary traditionalism. We may choose to label it tradition, nobility, or piety in order to console ourselves, but the reality remains unchanged.

As long as the culture of the book remains alive, the movement too will remain vibrant and dynamic. Every fresh idea that emerges should incline a da'i to return to the Qur'an and Sunnah for guidance, and in this so-called age of globalization, he must be able to offer ijtihadi insights on newly arising issues. But if he abandons study, he may remain a follower (*muqallid*), yet he will never become a leader (*qa'id*). From the outset, the core aim of the movement has been to cultivate leadership qualities in every worker, so that each one can face any situation with a movement-oriented mindset and in the light of Islam's moral code.

The vitality of any movement depends on a steady flow of intellectual nourishment from its leadership. Such nourishment is required not only in political matters but just as much in scholarly and intellectual concerns. If, at the global level, our study of economic, social, media, and international issues remains superficial, the movement will inevitably sink into intellectual narrowness and poverty. And if, in addition, even the analyses and solutions offered by the movement's leadership fifty years ago are left without fresh, research-based scrutiny, then the movement's future rests with Allah alone.

## 5.6 The role of research institutions

To carry this process forward, the leadership of the movement must lead by example and, through the generation of fresh thought, open up new horizons of reflection. In 1962, when Maulana Maududi R.A established a research institution in Karachi, his vision—as I witnessed firsthand—was to prepare a team that would not only preserve and carry forward his thought but also move beyond it, exploring new frontiers of knowledge and action and playing a constructive role in the intellectual growth of the movement.

This reflected a desire to build a scholarly resource for the future. It expressed a resolve that, after grounding the movement solidly in the Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, History, the blessed Sirah, and the works of Muslim scholars and thinkers, it should be equipped to produce new literature and exercise intellectual leadership. This was never meant to be a matter

of merely translating Maulana's essays or compiling them into collections; rather, in changing circumstances, it was an effort to prepare an entire generation—through courage, responsibility, and knowledge firmly rooted in the texts—to carry the call of da'wah to seekers of guidance both at home and abroad.

## 5.7 An important need of our time:

Today, in the stage through which the movement is passing, there is a need not only for new thinking but also for reinvigorating the very thought presented by Syed Maududi R.A. Some of his writings are such that with every reading, new dimensions and insights emerge. It is necessary, therefore, that as a matter of policy the culture of study be revived among those affiliated with the movement through circles of reflection, and that with an open mind they engage not only with the writings of the movement's leaders but also with the research-based study of other Islamic sources.

## 5.8 Intellectual revolution: A pre-requisite for success

The first stage of da'wah is an intellectual revolution. Unless thought itself changes, social transformation, political revolution, and a change of leadership may serve as decoration, but they cannot become lasting reality. The wholehearted unification of heart and mind, with full conviction, is the first step toward the success of da'wah. If this step is weak, then the building that rises to the skies will stand on a crooked and fragile foundation. Its outward grandeur cannot preserve it for long; even the slightest tremor of the earth can bring it crashing down from the heights into ruin.

The Noble Qur'an gives the example of a goodly tree whose foundation is the Mighty Book itself. And this very Book commands that not only the ordinary worker and office-bearer, but even the Greatest Guide ﷺ, act upon the divine injunction: *"Read (Iqra')."* It is only through careful and repeated study of the Qur'an and the movement's literature that the movement can be stirred toward the creation of fresh thought. Without

originality and renewal in thought, the movement cannot attain the position of leadership on the national or global stage.

# 6. The Importance of Studying the Sirah ﷺ

*Translation of an article by Maulana Naeem Siddiqui; published in the December 2018 edition of Tarjuman-ul-Quran*

**Note from the editor:**

Studying the Sīrah in its true spirit is essential for *tehreekī* workers who strive to establish the supremacy of Allah's Dīn in the world. But to truly benefit, one must be aware of the common pitfalls in approaching the Sīrah—pitfalls that often deprive us of its real lessons.

In this powerful article, Mawlānā Naeem Siddīqī shares his grief over how the Sīrah is often celebrated and studied today. He shows how, in our practices, we overlook its central focus and greatest Sunnah: dedicating oneself fully to the mission of Allah's Dīn. His reflections are not mere analysis but a heartfelt lament for what has been lost in our approach.

Above all, this article is a call—a call to revive the right consciousness and the proper method of studying the Sīrah. Only then can we extract its practical guidance and truly live the greatest Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ: embracing the mission of Allah's Dīn as the purpose of our lives and our movements, just as he ﷺ taught us.

## 6.1 Beyond Celebration: The True Purpose of Studying the Sirah

Many Muslims approach the study of the Prophet's ﷺ life, As-Sirah An-Nabawiyyah, with interest only for the sake of spiritual reward. And indeed, there is no denying that every effort to draw closer to the

Messenger ﷺ is beloved in the sight of Allah and a means of earning His grace. Yet, should not the foremost purpose of such study be the adornment and reform of one's own life?

Lavish gatherings of *Mawlid* are arranged with the belief that in these assemblies the radiant soul of the Prophet ﷺ manifests, and that he is pleased by the expressions of love shown by his followers. Trays of sweets, garlands of flowers, qawwālī and naat recitations, the spiraling fragrance of incense and aloeswood, the glow of chandeliers and lamps—all of these are outward symbols of devotion.

But the picture of reverence that such devotion paints often presents us, not with a human personality, but with a being entirely beyond humanity—a figure molded of light, whose every achievement is nothing but miracle, whose actions transcend the laws of cause and effect, whose tasks are carried out by angels, and whose words and deeds lie wholly outside the realm of human comprehension.

## 6.2 The Sirah as a Human Example

No believer can deny the essential truth that, when compared to all mankind, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ occupies such spiritual and moral heights that extraordinary phenomena are indeed found in his life—there are miracles, there are angels in motion. Yet, despite this, his pure life remains the life of a man—the best of men. And it is precisely this fact that constitutes the essence of his greatness: that such an unparalleled life was lived by a human being. Everything unfolds within the laws of nature, within the framework of history and hadith, and at each step along the road to success he offers lessons to humanity through the sacrifices of one who himself endured them as a human being.

It is in being a human life that his example becomes our model (*uswah*). And it is only through this understanding that we can truly learn from his sacred biography: to draw from it lessons of determination and courage; to learn from it steadfastness in principle and devotion to duty; to kindle within ourselves the spirit of serving humanity; and to awaken a burning

passion to confront and overcome the forces of evil.

And if the life of the Prophet ﷺ is seen merely as a chain of miracles—if he is regarded only as a superhuman being—then what model remains for us, the creatures made of clay? Before such a figure, we may feel awe and wonder; we may nurture devotion; but we cannot follow him. Inevitably, when attention is confined only to this extraordinary aspect of his being, the real, human pattern of his life is forgotten [—the life in which he married and raised a family, went to war, smiled and shed tears, suffered injury, and endured trials; the life that gives us the motivation to follow his footsteps and strive to make the Deen of Allah SWT supreme as he did and commanded us to!] And where this partial vision takes hold, practical life becomes equally detached from prophetic guidance. The irony, in fact, is that even those who plunge into the dens of vile economic and social crimes manage to soothe their restless consciences with this cheap display of sentiment: "*Whatever we may be, at least we belong to the community of the Beloved* ﷺ."

## 6.3 The Hollow Spirit of Hero-Worship

On the other side, a Western-inspired tendency appears in the form of hero-worship. In essence, it is an expression of national pride—a kind of chauvinism which proclaims before others: "See, we too possess such and such figures; our history abounds with men of greatness; and these are the achievements we have inherited as our glory." But this spirit is always hollow. Under it, nations celebrate the birthdays and anniversaries of countless personalities with pomp and grandeur, yet such commemorations never become occasions for true learning or emulation. The noble examples paraded with pride leave no trace in the lives of those who present them, nor is there ever serious attention to drawing lessons from them. Within this spirit, when gatherings are arranged to "refresh" the memory of the Messenger ﷺ, fine words may be uttered, but they produce no visible effect upon life.

## 6.4 When Sirah Is Stripped of Its Civilizational Vision

A third and equally flawed perspective is that which treats the Prophet's ﷺ message not as a comprehensive way of life, but merely as a "religion." Those influenced by this view imagine that the Messenger ﷺ came only to convey a handful of beliefs, some rituals, certain acts of worship, a few litanies and devotions, some moral exhortations, and a limited set of legal rulings. Such people derive benefit only in the realm of purity, prayer, fasting, supererogatory worship, and individual morality—but when it comes to the wider affairs of society, they serve every falsehood with complete indifference, and accommodate every form of ignorance.

This approach has, in effect, buried countless golden chapters of the Prophet's ﷺ sacred biography in the soil of forgetfulness, clutching instead only to a preface—and losing themselves in that alone. Because of such a shallow portrayal, not only are non-Muslims of the modern age unable to imagine the Prophet ﷺ as a leader of civilization, but even educated Muslim youth cannot conceive that he could be the guide of their society, or that his blessed example could offer solutions to the most pressing problems of our own times.

## 6.5 Enslaved by the System, Blind to the Sunnah

These mistaken perspectives thrive because the climate around us nurtures them. The political, social, and economic system in which we live requires a very different kind of human being—one shaped to its own pattern. Its machinery runs only with minds and characters cast in a particular mold. In other words, the kind of life exemplified by Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is deemed unnecessary for practical living in such a distored and material environment. In this marketplace, there is no demand for the treasure of thought and action that can be drawn from his life.

Accordingly, the system molds every aspect of society to its needs. Mothers' love and fathers' care raise children with the demands of this climate and this system in view. Institutions of education and training spend decades fashioning individuals into useful cogs for the service of this very system. Every conscious person, pressed by these conditions,

spends a lifetime adapting his mind and character to fit its pattern. Whatever this system despises, the whole environment labors to erase. Whatever speech it prefers, tongues automatically adopt. Whatever dress it favors, soon adorns everybody. At a mere signal, veils are lifted from the faces of women in once-modest households. Honor becomes whatever the system promotes, and disgrace whatever the prevailing culture condemns. The arts it values bring prestige; the pursuits it rejects fall into oblivion. It manufactures its own standards, enforces them on all, and lets no other tradition, value, or symbol survive.

A few spirited individuals and families do try to resist this sweeping tide. But the crushing pressures of economic deprivation, cultural backwardness, and social inferiority wear them down, and little by little they surrender themselves to the environment. In such a climate, even if books are written and read about the Prophet's life, even if sermons are given and heard, how can the taste for the **living model of the Prophet** ﷺ truly take root in people's hearts?

## 6.6 The Prophet's Life ﷺ: Not for Recital, But for Revolution

The plain truth is that the life of the Prophet ﷺ carries no message for those who seek to remain comfortably aligned with un-Islamic systems, or whose interests are tied up with bargains struck with falsehood. Such people may nod approvingly while reading the Sīrah; they may even experience intellectual delight or a touch of spiritual ecstasy; their knowledge may increase. But whence will come the urge to actually shape their lives according to that model?

We declare, however, that the life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is no imaginary tale. Its rank is by no means that of a charming story with which we ornament our literary gatherings. Its worth does not allow it to be consumed merely as a source of mental pleasure. Its sanctity forbids us to reduce it to a token of national pride.

Alas, these distorted perspectives are working together in our society, and they have become the real obstacle to the true purpose. Who can count

how many *Mawlid* celebrations and gatherings on the Prophet's life are held each year across our land? How many sermons and speeches resound through the air in the month of Rabi' al-Awwal? How many essays and books are written? How many special issues of journals are published? How many poems of praise are composed, and how many times sung by qawwals? How many feasts and banquets spread their delights upon dining cloths? How much money is poured into decorating markets, erecting arches, and building temporary structures?

And yet—on the other side—let us pause to ask: what is the real outcome of such vast expenditure of energy and wealth on what is, in itself, a noble purpose? Place in one pan of the scale a year's worth of these activities, and in the other, their tangible results. Then weigh them. How heavy are they? How many individuals, as a direct result of these well-meant efforts, actually commit themselves each year to molding their lives in the pattern of the Prophet's ﷺ? If each gathering, each essay, each hymn of praise, transformed even a single soul, imagine what the harvest of the last two centuries should have been! But if, in reality, that harvest is nowhere to be found, does this not show that some serious shortcoming lies in our efforts?

## 6.7 When Devotion Becomes a Mask for Denial

The grief is not merely that we have failed to attain what was truly sought; the deeper lament is that we are reaping what openly collides with the message and mission of the Benefactor of Humanity ﷺ. Within us today are growing those elements that declare the Prophet's ﷺ way of life impracticable. Elements that mock his teachings. Elements that would cast the entire record of his Sīrah, Sunnah, and Hadith into the sea. Elements that would divorce the Qur'an from the twenty-three years of struggle through which it was revealed, stripping it of its living embodiment. And, worst of all, there are those who, under the guise of interpretation, attempt to recast the Prophet's ﷺ personality, message, and mission into the mold of the present corrupt civilization—fashioning an entirely new image of the Benefactor of Humanity ﷺ to suit the taste of the world's dominant powers.

This is why, despite the countless displays of love and devotion to the Messenger ﷺ, despite the intellectual labors expended on the Sīrah, that transformed human being—the one who truly follows the model of life the Prophet ﷺ presented in perfection—has yet to rise upon the horizon of our history.

## 6.8 From Cave to Caravan: The Sirah ﷺ as History in Motion

The life of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is not the story of a lone man, but the unfolding of a force in history that took shape of a human being. It is not the record of a hermit withdrawn from the world, intent only on his private piety. It is the life-story of one who stood as the soul of a great collective mission and movement. It is not merely the voice of a man, but the voice of one who re-built the humanity. It is the chronicle of the architect of a new world, a story that carries within it the rise of a community, a revolutionary movement, and an order of life transformed.

The Sīrah of the Messenger ﷺ stretches from the cave of Ḥirāʾ to the cave of Thawr, from the sanctuary of the Kaʿbah to the markets of Ṭāʾif, from the chambers of the Mothers of the Believers to the fields of battle. Its imprint adorns the pages of countless lives: Abū Bakr and ʿUmar, ʿUthmān and ʿAlī, ʿAmmār, Yāsir, Khālid, Khuwailid, Bilāl and Ṣuhayb—may Allah be pleased with them all—each one a shining, living page of this one great Book of Sīrah. It is a garden entire, where every tulip and rose, every narcissus and hyacinth bears upon its petal the record of the Gardener's ﷺ sacred life. Wherever this caravan of spring has passed, it has left upon the dust the seal of fragrance. To present this exalted figure in biography merely as an individual—recording his great deeds, his celebrated campaigns, his habits and manners, collecting dates and excavating events—such writing can never fulfill the true purpose of Sīrah.

The life of the Messenger ﷺ is not like stagnant water in a pool that one might survey from the shore in a single glance. It is a flowing river—alive with motion, current, and struggle, with waves and foam, shells and pearls, and with water that revives barren fields again and again. To

fathom this river, one must journey with its stream. This is why, though many books on the Sīrah furnish rare information, they do not stir us; they do not awaken passion; they do not send new blood rushing through the veins of resolve; they do not break the crust of our inertia or kindle the spark of longing that once set a lone, unarmed man against a centuries-old, corrupt order—and triumphed.

## 6.9 Where All Greatness Converges:

In truth, the Prophet ﷺ was not, in the narrow sense of the word, a "great man." His life is not the tale of just another renowned figure to be counted among the famous of history. His was a being far above the ranks of the "great" and "celebrated": he was a divine gift, a mercy beyond compare.

Many "great men" have appeared in this world, and many more will continue to appear. Great are those who offered noble teachings or presented constructive ideas. Great are those who devised systems of ethics and law. Great are those who labored for social reform. Great are those who conquered lands and left behind the legacy of valor. Great are those who ruled vast empires, and great too are those who set before us astonishing examples of poverty and asceticism. Great are those who upheld the loftiest standards of personal morality before the world.

Yet, when we study the lives of such men, we generally find that the sap of their strength has been drained by one branch of their life, while the rest remain barren. One side may be dazzling with brilliance, but another lies in shadow. Here is excess; there is deficiency.

But in complete contrast stands the life of the Prophet ﷺ. Every aspect of his life is in harmony with the rest, each facet shining with the same perfection. There is majesty, and there is beauty. There is spirituality, and there is engagement with the material. There is the Hereafter, and there is the order of worldly life. There is a kind of self-effacement, and yet a commanding selfhood. There is the worship of God, and also love and compassion for His servants. There is a firm collective discipline, and at the same time a regard for the rights of the individual. There is deep

religiosity, and alongside it an all-encompassing politics and governance. There is devotion to leading the community, and yet the flow of family life moves with grace. There is relief for the oppressed, and there is a firm hand to restrain the oppressors.

## 6.10 The School of the Greatest Man

From the school of the Prophet's ﷺ life, every person can draw guidance alike—whether ruler, governor, minister, officer, worker, master, soldier, merchant, laborer, judge, teacher, preacher, leader, reformer, philosopher, or writer. For each there is a lesson in conduct. There is an exemplary model for the father, the companion in life, and the neighbor. Whoever once entered this school of learning never had to seek instruction at another door. Whatever height humanity could reach was embodied in this one being. That is why fair-minded people of the world can only call him by the title: *the Greatest of Men*.

History has known but one such *Greatest Man*. It is by his light alone that we can illuminate the halls of life in every age. Millions have drawn brightness from him; countless elders lit the lamps of their knowledge and deeds from his flame. His message echoes across the world, and the civilizations of many lands bear the deep imprint of his teaching. There is no human being who is not, in one way or another, indebted to him. And yet—how bitter the grief—that those who owe him the greatest debt remain strangers to him, knowing him not.

## 6.11 The Qur'an Wrapped, the Sīrah Shelved

The responsibility of introducing his being and spreading his message was placed upon the very community he founded. But this community itself has strayed far from him and from his call. In the pages of its books much is preserved, but in the open book of its practice no living image of the *Greatest Man* is to be seen. In the religiosity, politics, social order, morals, laws, and culture of this community, only faint traces of his way remain—and these too are blurred and deformed amidst a thousand alien marks. Not a single patch of earth bears witness in its collective life that it

reflects the principles he gave, or the traditions and values he established. Instead, this community wanders begging at the doors of corrupt systems, dazzled by every worldly power, ashamed of its own true inheritance. It has wrapped the Qur'ān in coverings, and turned the Prophet's ﷺ radiant Sīrah into a garland of memories, placed high upon a neglected shelf.

## 6.12Turning the Sun into a Lamp for a Corner of One House

A second great wrong was that we reduced ourselves into a religious and national faction, confining Prophet Muhammad ﷺ to the narrow role of our own communal leader, and making his universal message and model of life the monopoly of one group. Yet he came as a guide for all humanity, bringing a message and an example for all mankind. His Sīrah was meant to be presented as the living pattern through which every human being could shape himself, becoming a source of well-being for his fellow men, finding deliverance from the thorny wilderness of problems, and attaining a pure and wholesome order of life.

In truth, the Prophet's ﷺ message and example were like the light of the sun, the rain from the sky, and the breath of the wind—gifts for all without distinction. But through our own failing, we sealed them inside a sectarian shell. Today, people everywhere—whatever their country or creed—benefit, more or less, from Socrates and Plato, from Darwin and Machiavelli, from Marx and Freud, and from Einstein; and for none of these is there blind prejudice from any particular community. But when it comes to drawing benefit from the treasures of knowledge and guidance of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, countless barriers of bias rise up. The common thought is: "Muhammad ﷺ belongs to the Muslims, and Muslims are apart from us, as we are apart from them. What concern have we with their Prophet and leader?"

Alas, it is our own conduct as Muslims that has done much to create and spread this false impression. It is we ourselves who, by word and deed, have misrepresented the Benefactor of mankind ﷺ.

# 7. What to Include in Your Reading Plan

*Excerpt from a speech by Maulana Saʿādatullah Hussaini at an SIO gathering, published in Haadiya Magazine (with additional commentary).*

**Note from the editor:**

The delight of reading, like every other joy, takes its true value from what it leads to. Books that nurture faith, deepen knowledge, and inspire action that draws one nearer to Allah offer a praiseworthy and lasting delight. This aligns with the highest and purest form of joy: love of Allah, tranquility in His remembrance, and delight in His obedience — fruits that endure in both this world and the Hereafter.

By contrast, when reading becomes a pursuit of distraction, vanity, or ideas that distance the heart from truth, it sinks to the lowest kind of pleasure — fleeting, poisoned, and hollow, leaving only regret in its wake. Between these two extremes lie neutral enjoyments, common to all people, where the value of reading depends entirely on the book chosen and the spirit with which it is approached. For some it nourishes and benefits; for others it remains shallow and empty.

For this reason, one must be deliberate and discerning in what to read. Scholars have long recommended structured syllabi and essential works in every field, while Islamic movements often assign reading lists suited to different stages of development, ensuring that study progresses gradually and with purpose. Yet even the finest books yield little if read superficially; true delight arises only when they are approached with intention, absorption, and sincere reflection.

This chapter will therefore explore key principles for shaping a purposeful reading list, building upon the recommendations outlined in the previous chapters.

I always advise my friends to maintain a necessary balance in seven areas. In my opinion, a young person's study table should always contain seven types of books in proper balance.

## 7.1 The Qur'an

It should be read in its original Arabic language, and one should also try to understand it with the help of translations and tafsīr (exegesis). There should be a regular and consistent study of a set portion, and one should repeatedly return to the Qur'an in relation to one's intellectual, academic, and practical issues, always seeking solutions within it.

The Qur'an should essentially hold the status of a *reference book* on our study table or in our computer—central in importance—such that we consult it more frequently than any encyclopedia, dictionary, or other reference work.

## 7.2 Reading in Your Profession Alongside Its Islamic Framework

That is, if we are students of economics, we should read the most advanced and up-to-date works in economics, while also continuing to study Islamic economics. If our connection is with medical science, we should keep an eye on standard and authoritative research in medical science, and at the same time read those Islam-inclined authors who critically examine modern medical science from an Islamic perspective and are engaged in the effort to construct an Islamic model in this field.

## 7.3 The books of the pious predecessors (Salaf Ṣāliḥīn):

This is because our connection with the entire intellectual heritage of

Islamic history is essential for our proper scholarly and intellectual growth. We should, as much as possible, benefit from major works of Qur'anic exegesis, the *Ṣiḥāḥ Sitta* (the six authentic books of ḥadīth), and books on the principles of tafsīr and the principles of fiqh. Especially, figures such as Imām al-Ghazālī, Imām Ibn Taymiyyah (and his great student Ibn al-Qayyim), Ibn Khaldūn, and Shāh Walīullāh are key milestones and landmarks in our intellectual history. Without adequate benefit from them, there remains a great void in our knowledge and thought.

## 7.4 Literature of the Islamic Movement and that which supports the work of the Islamic movement

**Note from the editor:**

The Islamic Movement possesses a vast and invaluable body of literature—spanning tafsīr, sīrah, hadith, uṣūl, history, organizational thought, and much more. To benefit from it meaningfully, we must first acquaint ourselves with the leading thinkers and writers of our tehreeki tradition from around the world, understand the categories and genres of their work, and then chart a deliberate plan for engaging with it. Only then can we move from a surface-level familiarity to real depth in the study of this literature, drawing from it the intellectual nourishment and practical guidance our movement requires.

In particular, we should strive to read all the works of Maulana Mawdudi. Young friends with an academic inclination should also read those of his works which are not available in our country, since they too contain treasures of knowledge and wisdom. Alongside Maulana Mawdudi, we should also study the works of Maulana Sadruddin Islahi, Sayyid Qutb, and contemporary authors who have sought to address new issues under changing circumstances.

**Note from the editor:**

Alongside the foundational works of the Islamic movement, it is equally essential to study books that equip workers with the practical knowledge and skills needed to perform their tehreeki responsibilities with excellence. For example, those serving in the media department must master effective media techniques to advance the cause. Those engaged with youth or children should acquaint themselves with the psychological principles relevant to their work. Leaders must be well-versed in organizational dynamics, systems, and productivity tools. Finance team members should study the financial system, government regulations, legislation, and funding mechanisms in depth.

This list is by no means exhaustive. The key point is that every worker in the Islamic movement should strive to attain competence in their assigned responsibilities, perform them with ihsān (excellence), and surpass others in their field. In this way, their service becomes not only sincere but also effective, impactful, and worthy of the noble mission they carry.

## 7.5 Other Contemporary Islamic Writings

Beyond the well-known sphere of the Islamic movement, much valuable work has been done in the past—and continues to be done today—that forms an important part of Islamic thought. Many priceless books are being published both in our country and abroad.

## 7.6 Study of Jahili (Un-Islamic) Ideas and Sciences

The work of Islam cannot be carried out without a clear understanding of jahiliyyah [of the past and the present]. It is essential to study the philosophies, ideologies, intellectual trends, modern problems, structures, and complexities of the present world in order to grasp the nature of jahili thought and recognize the task before us.

## 7.7 Study of Literature

Some may disagree, but in my view, it is also necessary to read novels, short stories, poetry, essays, travelogues, columns, satire and humor, detective fiction, hunting tales, biographies, and so on. There are many aspects of wisdom that lie beyond the reach of dense academic books; these are often revealed through lighter, more subtle forms of literature. Literature grants mastery over language, lends sweetness and persuasiveness to expression, enriches vocabulary, strengthens command over idioms and everyday usage, and connects the lofty heights of knowledge and wisdom to the practical realities of daily life.

**Note from the editor:**

In this chapter, we have outlined certain categories of books that workers of the Islamic movement should devote themselves to. However, this list is not meant to be final or exhaustive. With reflection and experience, one may discover other beneficial categories of books that deserve inclusion. This is perfectly natural and even desirable. Continuous reflection, refinement, and expansion of one's reading scope are essential qualities for growth. The key is to remain intentional—choosing books that strengthen faith, sharpen intellect, and enhance one's ability to serve the dīn with excellence.

Section 3

# Practical Tips and Techniques

(Chapter 5 to 13)

# 8. How to Select the Reading List for Each of the Categories in the Plan

In the previous chapter, we outlined categories of books that workers of the Islamic movement should engage with. But awareness of categories alone is not enough. The greater task lies in making wise choices — selecting the right book at the right stage of one's journey. A book that is deeply beneficial for one reader may prove overwhelming for another, while a simpler text may fail to meet the needs of someone more advanced.

Several factors therefore deserve careful consideration: the reader's current stage in seeking knowledge; the styles and approaches of different books on the same subject, and how these align with one's learning temperament; the depth and breadth of a given book compared to the reader's present requirements; and the skills and competencies most urgently needed for effective work within the Islamic movement.

It is for this reason that we have dedicated this chapter to guiding readers in the art of book selection. Our aim is not only to provide practical considerations but also to nurture a thoughtful attitude toward reading itself. For when the right book is chosen with intention and care, it does not merely add to knowledge — it refines character, sharpens purpose, and strengthens one's service to the dīn. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to help readers choose what is truly beneficial, remembering that time is a precious gift that must be invested in the best and most rewarding way.

## 8.1 Four Types of Books:

Not every book deserves to be read. A seeker of knowledge must define his path and align his reading with the principles and priorities of the Islamic movement. He should neither grab every book that comes before

him, nor let himself be swayed by every passing subject. Otherwise, his precious time will be wasted and his greater purpose lost.

Before picking a book, one should pause and ask: *What do I need at this stage? What does the work of the movement require from me? What would the Ummah truly benefit from?* Reading without purpose is not just unhelpful—it can even be harmful, for it distracts the heart and mind from meaningful study.

Books fall into four broad categories:

1. **Poisonous books** – These must be avoided altogether. They include works that corrupt faith, pollute modesty, or erode moral character. Reading such material does not elevate a person, but drags him downward—away from the sweetness of īmān and onto the path of Shayṭān.

2. **Books to be tasted** – Some books are useful only for a glance, enough to know what they cover. For instance, when a person has casual curiosity in a field but no time or need to go deep, a quick "taste" is sufficient.

3. **Books to be swallowed** – These are works that should be understood thoroughly and given a full, careful reading, though they do not require constant revisiting.

4. **Books to be digested** – These are the essential works that must be read, re-read, absorbed, and allowed to shape one's thought and action. They become lifelong companions.

Spending a little time filtering books—knowing what to avoid, what to taste, what to swallow, and what to digest—dramatically improves the quality of what we feed our minds with. Aimless reading, on the other hand, is like filling a precious vessel with polluted water: it leaves little space for the pure and life-giving knowledge that should have been its share.

## 8.2 Balancing the Time-Tested and the Contemporary

When deciding which books deserve our time, one useful measure is endurance. A work that continues to be studied and preserved across generations is seldom accidental; its survival points to lasting worth. Just as a tree that withstands many storms proves the strength of its roots, so too a book that has nourished minds through the ages bears witness to the value it contains.

There are core sciences and foundational works in Islam — the great books of tafsīr, ḥadīth, and uṣūl — that form the very backbone of our religion. These classics are timeless, their endurance proven across centuries. They cannot be replaced or neglected, for they safeguard the essence of revelation and the methodologies by which generations of scholars have understood it. Their survival is itself a testimony to their continuing relevance and reliability, and they remain the bedrock upon which every serious student and worker for Islam must build.

At the same time, our tradition has always recognized that some aspects of the religion require fresh engagement in every era. Certain rulings of fiqh, for example, shift according to changing circumstances; new reflections on the Qur'an come to light as human experience deepens; and the challenges and problems faced by each generation call for new responses. For these areas, contemporary works are not just optional—they are necessary. To ignore them is to fall into the error of blind imitation. As Dr. Jasser Auda notes in *Re-Envisioning Islamic Scholarship*, taqlīd in this sense—an uncritical reliance on inherited formulations without engaging new realities—is among the most damaging flaws of modern Islamic thought.

This is why the worker for Islam must strike a balance. On the one hand, he must anchor himself firmly in the time-tested core, returning again and again to the great references of tafsīr, ḥadīth, and uṣūl. On the other hand, he must also remain attentive to beneficial new contributions that clarify timeless principles for today's questions, and provide practical guidance for specialized fields of work—whether in media, education, youth work, or leadership.

The mistake of many readers today is to rush uncritically toward the latest books because they are fashionable or widely discussed. Most of these quickly fade, leaving little behind. By contrast, a wise reader prioritizes what is foundational, and then chooses carefully among contemporary works that truly serve the dīn, the Ummah, and the responsibilities of the movement. In this way, reading becomes not a chase after novelty, but a purposeful journey—rooted in the enduring, yet responsive to the needs of the age.

## 8.3 Seek Guidance in Choosing Books

We do not begin our reading journey alone. One of the best ways to select beneficial books is to rely on the guidance of scholars, teachers, and elders in the Islamic movement. Their experience helps us avoid wasting time and ensures our reading matches both our stage of learning and the needs of our work.

Today, many scholars recommend suggested reading lists—covering the essential references in Qur'an, Sunnah, history, and specialized fields of daʿwah and movement work. Such guidance can save the student of knowledge from wandering aimlessly, ensuring that his efforts are directed to what is most beneficial.

In particular, a worker for Islam should seek the counsel of his own teachers and elders. They not only know the books of the tradition but also understand the demands of the work at hand. Their advice can help match one's stage of learning, personal strengths, and assigned responsibilities with the right reading. In this way, reading becomes purposeful and aligned with service to the Ummah.

## 8.4 Read what you need

Reading should begin with clear priorities. A Muslim must first learn what he is mukallaf of — the obligations for which he will be held accountable before Allah. Matters of ʿaqīdah, worship, and daily duties take precedence. Once this foundation is secure, attention should then turn to what is most needed for one's role in the Islamic movement and

service to the Ummah. In this way, reading remains purposeful, directed toward what brings both worldly benefit and eternal success.

## 8.5 Foundations Before Depth

Every person should read in line with his own capacity and background. The level of a graduate of *Dars-e-Nizami* or a PhD is not the same as that of a layperson with general interest, nor the same as that of a casual reader. Each must select books appropriate to his ability; otherwise, he risks "tearing through books while remaining ignorant." A book should neither be so overwhelming that one gains nothing from it, nor so simplistic that it leaves the thirst for knowledge unquenched. It must match the level the reader is at.

Just as a child begins with the *Qaʿidah* before reciting the Qurʾān, the seeker of knowledge must begin with introductory works before progressing to advanced texts. Recognizing this need, our *aslāf* and imams authored concise primers in every field of knowledge. Beginners should start with such works, for they clarify the basics and lay the foundation for deeper study. Short booklets and brief *mutoon* should not be dismissed. Though compact, they provide real substance and carry a psychological benefit: completing them gives a sense of progress and achievement, while ensuring that the core principles are firmly grasped and retained.

The Islamic intellectual tradition has been uniquely blessed in that it offers texts for every stage of learning across all sciences. This treasury enables each seeker to find works suited to his level. Once a person has acquired a solid grip over the foundational texts in a given field, he can then move on to intermediate and advanced works with confidence.

For this reason, observing the proper order in study is essential. Skipping steps leads not to mastery but to confusion. Foundations must be firmly laid before higher levels can be built. Sequence — progressing gradually from simple to complex — is the path by which real expertise is cultivated, and the way in which the scholars of the past attained both depth and breadth.

In this way, purposeful reading becomes both realistic and fruitful: it begins with what one must know, grows gradually in line with one's capacity, and always remains anchored in the responsibility to serve Allah, His dīn, and the Ummah with knowledge that is both sound and actionable.

## 8.6 The Interconnected Path of Study

No branch of the Islamic sciences exists in isolation. Tafsīr depends on ḥadīth, ḥadīth relates to fiqh, fiqh rests on uṣūl, and all of them are strengthened by Arabic language, history, and other supporting disciplines. A person who immerses himself in one field while neglecting the others will always miss part of the picture. True understanding comes only when the sciences are studied together, like pieces of a single puzzle that reveal their meaning in relation to one another.

## 8.7 Read What You Apply

### *8.7.1 Importance of practicing what you learn*

One of the best ways to secure knowledge is to act upon it. A book whose lessons can be applied immediately leaves a far deeper mark than one that remains only theoretical. Practice not only reinforces memory but transforms reading into lived experience. Once the foundations are established through sound understanding and the practical implementation of the obligatory duties (*farāʾiḍ*), one should turn their attention to the specific practical guidance required for their role.

### *8.7.2 Dawrat At-Tadabbur*

The first step in this journey is to return to the Qurʾān and Sunnah and engage in Dawrāt al-Tadabbur — repeated cycles of reflection and contemplation — in order to draw insights for specific fields, cases, or problems. The Qurʾān, Sunnah, and Sīrah can be approached from many angles, and whichever perspective one brings, they always reveal guidance relevant to that concern. As our teacher Dr. Jasser Auda emphasizes, Dawrāt al-Tadabbur is profoundly beneficial for uncovering principles and solutions to the diverse challenges faced by humanity.

He has outlined this method beautifully in his book Re-Envisioning Islamic Scholarship, a work that every seeker of knowledge should read. In it, he explains what dimensions one should focus on during tadabbur to extract guidance on a given topic — such as key concepts, groups and actors, universal laws, commands and prohibitions, proofs, values, and overarching objectives.

### *8.7.3 Books that provide guidance about specific roles and tasks*

Alongside the above, one should also engage with books whose lessons can be applied immediately and practically. A worker involved in daʿwah, for instance, will benefit from works that outline effective methods and techniques of daʿwah, which can be put into practice without delay. Those responsible for finance can gain from books on accounting procedures, fairness and accountability in Islam, the system of waqf, and Islamic finance. Such focused reading ensures that knowledge is not only understood but lived.

For this reason, both students of knowledge and workers in the Islamic movement should give priority to books that connect directly to their responsibilities.

Of course, not every book is a manual for immediate practice—and that is fine. Many works build vision, refine character, and expand one's horizon in ways less direct but equally essential. Yet, whenever possible, giving priority to books whose benefit can be put into practical use ensures that reading never remains a passive exercise. It becomes a source of growth, service, and transformation.

## 8.8 Do Prior Research

Before diving into a book, it is wise to gain some context about it. Knowing the author, their background, and the circumstances in which a work was written can completely change the way we read and understand it. The same text may carry very different meanings when seen in light of its author's life, intentions, and the social or political environment of its time.

For instance:

- Consider Maulana Maududi's *Masla-e-Qaumiyyat*. It was written in the pre-partition context, when some attempted to mislead Muslims into believing that Hindus and Muslims were one nation. The book was a clear response to that challenge. Those very arguments continue to resurface in different countries and contexts even today. Knowing this background enables one to use the book effectively, drawing upon its reasoning to counter such claims in our own time.
- Likewise, his *Masla-e-Qurbani* addressed those who objected to the practice of sacrifice, arguing that its cost should instead be diverted elsewhere—an objection that, unfortunately, persists to this day. Understanding the circumstances in which this book was written helps the reader better appreciate the evidences and arguments it presents, and equips them to answer contemporary objections with clarity and confidence.
- As for his *Khutbat*, these were written for a mixed audience of Muslims and non-Muslims, explaining the fundamentals of Islam in a simple, accessible style. A worker of the Islamic movement engaged in daʿwah to non-Muslims can use this work with greater effectiveness when aware of the context and purpose behind its composition.

This principle applies not only to tehreeki books but to all books. Whenever you pick up a new work, it is worth asking:

- Was the author known for reliability and sound scholarship?
- What motivated them to write this book?
- Did they belong to a particular school of thought or intellectual trend that shaped their perspective?
- Was the book composed in response to a pressing issue of its time?
- Does the author have an agenda or bias? How might their cultural or intellectual background influence their conclusions?
- Has the book been translated, abridged, or reprinted—and if so, how might that affect its meaning?
- What other works—by this author or by others—address the same

issue, and how do they compare or complement this one?

This kind of prior research not only protects the reader from blind acceptance and misunderstanding but also helps in extracting the maximum benefit. A book is never just ink on paper—it is the product of a mind, a time, and a place. To read it well, we must keep all three in sight.

## 8.9 Broadening Through Multi-Disciplinary Reading

A well-rounded mind does not confine itself to a single subject. The seeker of knowledge benefits immensely by acquiring the foundational principles of multiple disciplines, for each science provides tools—mental models—that help illuminate others. You do not need to master every field, but grasping the basics gives you the ability to recognize patterns, predict outcomes, and avoid narrowness of thought.

For example, a student of Islam who understands history will better appreciate the context and Asbab An-Nuzool of Qurʾānic revelation and ḥadīth. One who knows the fundamentals of psychology can be more effective in daʿwah and tarbiyah. A grasp of macro and micro-economics allows one to appreciate the importance of Islamic principles of economics and finance. Even at an introductory level, each discipline provides an additional lens through which both the realities of life and the guidance of the Sharīʿah can be more fully understood.

Without these foundations, one risks building their intellectual house on sand: impressive at first sight, but collapsing with the slightest storm. With them, however, the reader stands on solid ground—able to connect ideas, draw deeper insights, and serve the dīn and the Ummah with greater wisdom.

## 8.10Don’t Be Afraid to Quit Books

Not every book deserves to be finished. Once you begin reading and realize that a book is not relevant, beneficial, or suitable, do not hesitate to put it down. Time is too precious to waste on material that adds little value.

A book usually reveals its worth quickly. A glance at the table of contents, a skim through chapter titles and headings, or a read of a few sample pages is often enough to judge whether it is worth your time. If the ideas are shallow, repetitive, too complex, or distracting, leave it aside and move on.

The seeker of knowledge should never feel guilty for leaving aside a book. On the contrary, this discipline safeguards the mind from distraction and clutter, allowing it to focus on what truly benefits. A wise approach is simple: begin many books, set aside those that are irrelevant or unhelpful without regret, and revisit the truly valuable ones time and again until their lessons are firmly rooted.

## 8.11Repetition of Reading Is Better than Diversification

Do not hesitate to return to a book you have already read. In fact, revisiting books is both valuable and recommended, for it often reveals insights missed the first time. The renowned literary figure **al-ʿAqqād** once remarked:

"*Reading one book three times is better than reading three different books once.*"[23]

His words remind us that rereading is not a sign of weakness or forgetfulness, but a mark of seriousness — a way of deepening understanding and allowing knowledge to sink into the heart. This wisdom was lived by the Aslaf and the great scholars of Islam, who recognized that the real fruits of knowledge are reaped through repetition, reflection, and review.

**Imām al-Bukhārī** (may Allah have mercy on him), when asked about how memorization is secured, replied: "*By constant review.*"

In other words, mastery lies not in sampling widely, but in returning again and again to the same text until its meanings settle firmly in the

[23] Al-ʿImrān, ʿAlī. Al-Mushawwiq ilā al-Qirāʾah wa Ṭalab al-ʿIlm (The One Who Inspires Toward Reading and Seeking Knowledge), p. 90

heart.

**Al-Rabīʿ al-Muzanī**, the devoted student of Imām al-Shāfiʿī, said: "I have been reading al-Risālah for fifty years, and I do not know of a single time I looked into it except that I benefited from something I had not known before." (al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2/99)

Similarly, **Imām al-Zuhrī** (d. 124H) used to say: "*Whoever seeks knowledge all at once will lose it all at once. Knowledge is only attained over days and nights*."

This is why the scholars would return to the same works repeatedly, knowing that each reading opens new doors of understanding.

**Imām Ibn al-Qayyim** (may Allah have mercy on him), whose vast personal library was one of the marvels of his age, would not suffice with reading once. His writings reveal layer upon layer of meanings drawn from his repeated contemplation of the Qurʾān, Sunnah, and the words of the scholars before him. His practice embodied the saying of Ibn Masʿūd (may Allah be pleased with him): "*This Qurʾān is not to be recited hastily like poetry. Rather, pause at its wonders, move hearts with it, and let none of you be concerned merely with reaching the end of the sūrah*."

The lesson is clear: repetition deepens, while superficial diversification often distracts. A person may read a hundred books but retain little, while another who reads one book repeatedly, with patience and reflection, comes away transformed. As **Imam Ibn Taymiyyah** (may Allah have mercy on him) warned: "*Whoever's heart Allah does not illuminate with obedience, then the abundance of books will only increase him in confusion and misguidance*."

Indeed, one wise man once said: "*If a book is worth reading once, it is worth reading a hundred times*."

The seeker of knowledge should therefore choose carefully, but once a truly beneficial book is found, cling to it, return to it, and make it part of one's lifelong companionship. The Qurʾān itself is its greatest example:

revealed once, but meant to be read, recited, and contemplated without end—each reading uncovering new treasures.

O Allah, make us among those who fill their lives with the repetition of Your Book and with beneficial works that refine the heart, enlighten the mind, and draw us closer to You.

# 9. Types of reading

## 9.1 Know your why

In the previous chapter, we outlined four categories of books: those that are poisonous and must be avoided, those that are to be tasted, those that are to be swallowed, and those that are to be digested. The first category requires no further explanation. As for the latter three, the distinction between tasting, swallowing, and digesting depends on a deeper matter: the purpose for which one is reading.

Reading should never be aimless. The starting point is to define a clear purpose and vision. Ask yourself: What am I striving toward? What knowledge or skill do I need in order to serve Allah, improve myself, or benefit the Ummah? This reflection will reveal the gaps that must be filled. Along the journey, new gaps may emerge — and these too should be addressed in light of your purpose.

Once you have identified the gap, seek the book that can best fill it. When you arrive at a suitable book through this process, pause again and revisit the "why." Ask: Why am I reading this particular book? Is it to strengthen a weakness in my knowledge, to understand an argument, to find a reference, to build deeper mastery, or simply to refresh the mind? Then go one step deeper: Why is this my purpose?

By probing beneath the surface, you uncover the true driver of your reading. If that driver is to seek Allah's pleasure, to refine yourself, or to serve the Ummah, then rejoice and proceed. But if it is only to impress others, to indulge the ego, or to pass time without benefit, then refrain— for reading without purpose wastes both time and heart.

Once the "why" is clear, you can decide what to do with the book. Some texts may only need to be skimmed or "tasted," others absorbed more carefully, while the most essential must be "digested" until they become

part of your very thinking and practice. This clarity protects from scattered reading and ensures that every effort brings you closer to your greater goals.

At the same time, not all reading is for weighty purposes. Pleasure reading has a place too. Enjoying stories, poetry, or even light fiction can be beneficial—expanding imagination, sharpening language, and giving the mind a rest from heavier studies.[24] Many scholars themselves found refreshment in poetry and literature. For this kind of reading, you need not overthink methods or outcomes; keep it simple and relaxing.

But when you read for the sake of Allah, or to transform your life, or to serve the cause of Islam, then your "why" demands seriousness. Such reading should be approached with focus, retention, and the intent to act upon what is learned. In this way, every page turns into a step toward your purpose in this world and success in the Hereafter.

## 9.2 The Four Levels of Reading:

We now turn to four distinct types of reading, each requiring a different degree of mental engagement. The choice of which method to adopt depends on the purpose of one's reading, as discussed in the previous section. The wisdom of recognizing these levels lies in directing one's mental energy wisely—devoting greater focus where it is most needed and conserving effort where a lighter touch is sufficient. Let us now consider each of these levels in turn.

## 9.3 Elementary Reading:

Elementary reading is the most basic level of reading—the stage of grasping words, sentences, and their direct meanings. This is the foundation taught to children in schools, but it also remains relevant for adults when reading in a language that is not their mother tongue.

For instance, in many Islamic seminaries, subjects such as *Manṭiq* (logic),

---

[24] We briefly touched upon this point in chapter 7.

*Farāʾiḍ* (inheritance law), or *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* are taught from Arabic texts. Teachers often dedicate a considerable amount of time to explaining vocabulary, syntax, and grammar to ensure that students can follow the text accurately. While this linguistic training is undoubtedly beneficial, it sometimes causes the actual subject matter to fade into the background. Students may end up concentrating more on parsing individual words and sentence structures than on reflecting deeply upon the core concepts of the discipline itself.

As reading proficiency develops, the time spent at this level decreases, but it remains the necessary gateway for all higher levels of reading. Without it, meaningful engagement with the text is impossible.

## 9.4 Inspectional Reading:

### *9.4.1 What is this type of reading about?*

Inspectional reading, or *reading to inform*, is a quick and purposeful way of engaging with a book. The aim here is not deep understanding, but rather to grasp the overall structure, main arguments, and essential themes. It allows the reader to decide whether a book deserves more detailed study, or whether a quick overview is sufficient. In essence, this is about "tasting" a book.

This type of reading is especially useful when exploring a new topic, browsing a bookstore, or selecting material for research. By skimming the preface, introduction, table of contents, index, and chapter headings, one can quickly understand what the book covers. Sampling a few passages here and there provides a sense of the author's style and arguments. Sometimes, this level of engagement is all that is needed—many popular works, for example, reveal their central idea in the first chapter, with the rest merely elaborating on the same point.

Far from being a careless habit, inspectional reading reflects wisdom in managing one's time and attention. Not every book warrants slow, detailed study. As the scholars of the past advised, knowledge is too vast to be pursued aimlessly—one must learn to discern what is most

beneficial. Inspectional reading is a tool for that discernment, helping the seeker of knowledge allocate his energy to books that truly deserve digestion and mastery.

### *9.4.2 Two types of inspectional reading*

There are two common methods of inspectional reading. The first is **systematic skimming**, which involves intentionally scanning key sections—such as the introduction, headings, and highlighted parts—to map out the contents. The second is **superficial reading**, in which one reads the book quickly from beginning to end without pausing for notes or deeper reflection. Both methods help the reader capture the essence of a book without expending excessive time or effort.

### *9.4.3 A word of caution*

That said, a word of caution is in order. In contexts where deeper understanding is essential—such as when reading works included in the curriculum of Islamic movements—many readers fall into the trap of mere superficial inspectional reading. This undermines the very purpose of the curriculum. What is needed instead is careful reflection and deeper engagement. To achieve this, measures such as study circles, interactive discussions, and workshops should be encouraged, and readers must be given sufficient time to absorb key ideas before moving on.

## 9.5 Analytical Reading:

Analytical reading is the stage where one engages with a book thoroughly in order to truly understand it. If inspectional reading gives only a quick taste, analytical reading is the act of chewing carefully and swallowing—working through the arguments until they are clear and settled in the mind.

At this level, the reader is no longer skimming or sampling. Instead, he reads patiently, asking questions, examining the author's reasoning, and ensuring he grasps the structure and purpose of the book. It is an effort to understand the author on his own terms, before passing judgment. As Imām al-Bukhārī (رحمه الله) reminded his students, memorization and

mastery come only *"by constant review."* This type of deliberate engagement is what transforms reading from mere exposure into real comprehension.

To practice analytical reading, one should:

- **Classify the book** — What field does it belong to, and what kind of work is it?
- **Grasp the purpose** — State briefly what the book is trying to accomplish.
- **Outline its structure** — Identify its major parts and how they fit together.
- **Understand its key terms and arguments** — Clarify what the author means and how he supports his claims.

Analytical reading is thus the real *workhorse* of learning. It allows us to move beyond surface impressions and into genuine understanding. But even here, one must remember: reading a single book deeply does not make one a master of a field.

## 9.6 Syntopical Reading: From Reading to Mastery

True digestion—synthesizing across many works—comes only with the next stage, syntopical reading. Just as the body cannot survive on a single nutrient, the mind cannot be nourished by a single book. We require a variety of works, each offering its own unique benefit, while carefully guarding against what is harmful or misleading. In physical digestion, the body absorbs what is useful, turning it into strength that flows through the blood, while discarding what is waste. In the same way, through wide and deliberate reading, and by applying the methods of digestion explained in chapters 10 and 11, the mind absorbs what is sound and beneficial until it becomes part of one's very way of thinking, while casting aside what is false or unhelpful. Only then does knowledge become fully integrated, transformative, and life-giving. This section is an inroduction to that process of digestion.

Syntopical reading—sometimes called comparative reading—is the

highest and most demanding level of reading. While analytical reading allows you to chew carefully and swallow one book, syntopical reading is where you digest knowledge across many books and make it part of your own thought.

This type of reading requires surveying a subject broadly, comparing perspectives, weighing evidence, sitting at the feet of scholars to verify one's understanding, and recognizing both points of agreement and difference. At this level, you are not just trying to understand what a single author is saying. Rather, you are creating a dialogue between authors, bringing them into conversation with one another, and then forming your own informed conclusion. It is the stage at which reading becomes truly creative and productive.

In a nutshell, the following can be defined as the stages of syntopical reading:

- **Survey the field —** Identify the major works on a topic. This begins with wide exploration, sometimes using inspectional reading to quickly assess which books are most relevant.
- **Frame your questions —** Instead of only following the author's agenda, clarify the questions you want answered. These questions then guide your study across multiple texts.
- **Translate concepts —** Authors often use different terms for similar ideas. Your task is to create a common language so their arguments can be compared meaningfully.
- **Compare and contrast —** Examine how different authors answer the same questions, where they agree, and where they differ.
- **Synthesize and conclude —** Build your own structured understanding of the subject, integrating insights from multiple sources while recognizing where disagreements remain unresolved.

This method is demanding, but it yields the richest fruit. It is the kind of study that produces deep fluency in a subject, enabling the reader not only to know what others have said, but to contribute meaningfully to the

ongoing discourse. Scholars of the past engaged in this practice constantly—cross-examining narrations in ḥadīth, comparing juristic arguments in fiqh, or weighing different tafsīr perspectives.

This type of reading is extremely beneficial for the workers of Islamic Movement. A worker engaged in daʿwah to non-Muslims, for example, might practice syntopical reading in the field of comparative religion. He could study multiple tafāsīr of Qur'ānic verses addressing the People of the Book, read classical refutations of distorted beliefs, and then compare these with modern critiques of Biblical translations or contemporary works on Christian theology. By bringing these sources into dialogue, he develops not only a deeper understanding of the Qur'ān's guidance but also sharper tools for addressing modern arguments with wisdom and clarity.

Syntopical reading is not just about accumulation of knowledge; it is about transformation. It forces the reader to move beyond passive acceptance into critical engagement. As a result, it cultivates originality, sharpens judgment, and refines the ability to apply knowledge to new contexts.

It is here that reading reaches its highest purpose: not merely to inform or even to understand, but to master a subject in service of Allah, the Ummah, and the responsibilities entrusted to us.

# 10. Preparing to Read

Reading is not a passive act; it is an engagement of the mind, body, and spirit. To truly benefit from books, one must approach them with preparation and method. Just as a traveler equips himself before a journey, the seeker of knowledge must prepare himself before opening a book.

This chapter explores some of the effective techniques for preparing to read—both inwardly and outwardly—so that the act of reading yields the greatest benefit. We have tried to focus on the essential foundations: psychological readiness, cultivating the right mindset; intellectual preparation, sharpening focus and purpose; spiritual preparation, approaching knowledge with sincerity and humility; and physical preparation, ensuring the body supports the effort of the mind.

## 10.1Psychological Preparation

Before diving into a book, the state of your mind matters as much as the content in your hands. Many reading struggles come not from lack of time or ability, but from approaching books with the wrong mindset—whether boredom, distraction, or the assumption that "I already know this." Psychological preparation means cultivating the right attitudes and mental habits so that reading becomes purposeful, engaging, and transformative.

### *10.1.1 Seeing Beyond "I Already Know"*

Allah ﷻ says:

وَذَكِّرْ فَإِنَّ الذِّكْرَىٰ تَنفَعُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

*"And remind, for indeed the reminder benefits the believers."* (Qur'an 51:55)

This ayah reminds us that knowledge is not only about discovering new things. Often, the real benefit lies in revisiting what we think we already know. Much of the time, our sense of mastery is only an illusion — and a careful return to the same subject can lift the veil of ignorance we did not realize was there.

This false sense of certainty is known as the *illusion of knowing*. It deceives us into believing that we have understood or mastered something, while in reality our grasp is shallow. To overcome this, we must train ourselves to pause, review, and test our understanding. Self-assessment, honest reflection, and being open to correction allow us to replace the illusion of knowledge with true, lasting learning.

By approaching books with humility, and by refreshing our memory through reminders, we nurture both the mind and the heart. What seems repetitive in study is often the very path that deepens understanding and makes knowledge firm.

### *10.1.2 Read What Genuinely Interests You*

One of the most effective ways to nurture a lasting reading habit is to begin with books that genuinely spark your interest. When you engage with a subject you care about—whether history, philosophy, science, or even fiction—the motivation to read comes naturally. Over time, that initial interest lays the foundation for developing the discipline and skill to read more broadly across genres.

Here I wish to share a deeply inspiring incident mentioned in John Holt's book *Learning All the Time*, which I was fortunate to discover during a course with ERDC under the supervision of my teacher and mentor, Sir Salman Asif Siddiqui.

The story is about Leon, a seventeen-year-old student once labeled nearly "illiterate" and failing in all his classes. During a summer program, he encountered Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s *Why We Can't Wait*. The book resonated so deeply with him that he stood before his teachers, holding it up and crying out in frustration: *"Why didn't anyone ever tell me about this*

*book?"* For the first time, he encountered a text that spoke directly to his own reality—and with it came the spark of motivation to read. That motivation soon gave rise to skill, and once awakened, the ability naturally extended to other genres and subjects.

The lesson is simple: begin with what draws your heart. When you find books that inspire and engage you, reading ceases to be a burden and becomes a pursuit of delight. From there, you can branch out—moving from what captivates you to what challenges you, gradually expanding your intellectual horizons. Trusted recommendations from scholars, mentors, or professors can also point you toward books of enduring value, ensuring that your interest aligns with works that bring real benefit.

### *10.1.3 The Blessing of Desirable Difficulties*

True mastery in knowledge is not gifted through comfort or ease. As Islamic tradition testifies, the most elevated levels of understanding are earned through exertion and constant striving. A famous maxim encapsulates this truth:

لَا يُسْتَطَاعُ الْعِلْمُ بِرَاحَةِ الْجِسْمِ

*"Knowledge cannot be attained with bodily comfort."* (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, p. 309, ḥadīth no. 6120)[25]

Imām al-Shāfiʿī beautifully expanded on this reality in verse, reminding us that honor and knowledge come only through sleepless effort and high

[25] This saying reminds us that the higher ranks of knowledge are not reached without sustained effort and bodily exertion in its pursuit. Imām ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Ḥātim (رحمه الله) illustrated this reality from his own life. He said: "We stayed in Egypt for seven months, during which we did not eat a single dish of stew. Our entire days were spent in the gatherings of the shuyūkh, and our nights in copying and comparing texts. One day, a companion and I went to a shaykh, but were told that he was unwell. On the way back, we saw a fish that pleased us, so we bought it. When we reached home, the time for a gathering had already come, so we left without preparing it. For three days it remained with us until it nearly spoiled. In the end, we ate it raw, for we had no spare time to cook it or to ask anyone else to do so. Then he said: *'Knowledge cannot be attained with bodily comfort.'*" (Siyar Aʿlām al-Nubalāʾ 13/266; Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ 3/830)

aspiration:

بِقَدرِ الكدِّ تُكتَسَبُ المَعالي
وَمَن طَلبَ العُلا سَهرَ اللَّيالي

وَمَن رامَ العُلا مِن غَيرِ كَدٍ
أضاعَ العُمرَ في طَلَبِ المُحالِ

تَرومُ العِزَّ ثم تَنامُ لَيلًا
يَغوصُ البحر من طلبِ اللآلي

عُلوُّ القدرِ بالهمم العَوالي
وعزُّ المَرءِ في سَهرِ الليالي

تركت النوم ربي في الليالي
لأجل رضاك يامولى الموالي

فوفقني إلى تحصيل علم
وبلغني إلى أقصى المعالي

*By toil and striving, lofty ranks are won,*
*For he who seeks high honor stays awake at night.*

*Whoever desires greatness without effort,*
*Wastes his life chasing what can never be attained.*

*You long for glory yet sleep through the night,*
*While the pearls of the sea are only gained by those who dive.*

*High status is reached through lofty aspirations,*
*And a person's honor lies in sleepless nights of effort.*

*I left my sleep at night, O Lord, for Your sake,*
*Seeking Your pleasure, O Master of all masters.*

*So grant me success in attaining knowledge,*
*And raise me to the highest of stations.*

This was a recurring theme in the lives of the Salaf. When one of the pious predecessors was asked how he had attained such vast knowledge, he replied:

بالمصباح والجلوس إلى الصباح.

*By the lamp, and by sitting until the morning.*

Another was asked about that, and he said:

بالسفر، والسهر، والبكور في السحر

*"Through travel, sleeplessness, and rising early before dawn."*

Modern research on learning echoes this timeless wisdom through the concept of "desirable difficulties." These are deliberate challenges that make learning more effortful in the short term, yet lead to stronger, longer-lasting understanding.

Why begin with "difficulties"? Because recognizing from the outset that "real learning requires effort" reshapes the learner's mindset. Knowledge does not settle in the heart through comfort or shortcuts. It becomes firm only when one strives for it, refusing mediocrity and aspiring to excel. This 'striving' is embedded within the following principle passsed down to us from our scholars:

إِنَّما العِلمُ بالتَّعلُّمِ والفقهُ بالتَّفقُّهِ

*"Indeed, knowledge comes through striving to learn, and understanding (fiqh)*

*comes through striving to gain understanding."*[26]

It is important to understand the word التعلُّم in order to appreciate the meaning of this statement and its relevance to our context. It comes from a particular Arabic pattern that carries the sense of exerting effort upon oneself, acquiring something gradually, and training through repetition and practice. In other words, the increase in knowledge does not come by mere exposure or comfort, but by active, step-by-step work: attending and reviewing, reading and annotating, memorising and revising, asking and reflecting, teaching and applying.

Seen this way, التعلُّم functions like a program for growth: making yourself learn deliberately, patiently, and incrementally until truths move from the page into habit. This disciplined digestion of knowledge turns information into understanding and understanding into character.

Such awareness nurtures resilience, focus, and humility, while protecting us from the illusion that skimming or passive listening can substitute for purposeful engagement. Once we recognize that genuine learning demands effort, practices like reviewing, reflecting, practicing, and teaching cease to be optional—they become essential tools for transforming knowledge into something lasting. Learning, then, is not about ease or instant results but about embracing productive struggle, trusting that temporary hardship yields enduring benefit.

---

[26] This statement is reported in numerous works, though with some variation in wording—for example: al-ʿIlm by Abū Khaythamah (p. 114), Majmaʿ al-Zawāʾid by al-Haythamī (1/133: Ibn Masʿūd—narrators trustworthy; Muʿāwiyah—with an unnamed narrator), Kashf al-Khafā by al-ʿAjlūnī (1/249), al-Targhīb wa al-Tarhīb by al-Mundhirī (1/72), Ithāf al-Khiyara al-Mahra by al-Būṣīrī (1/199), Takhreej Minhāj al-Qāṣidīn (p. 182), Sharḥ al-Bukhārī by Ibn al-Mulaqqin (3/326), ʿIlal al-Dāraqutnī (2037), al-ʿIlal al-Mutanāhiya by Ibn al-Jawzī (1/85), Takhrīj al-Iḥyāʾ by al-ʿIrāqī (3/218), and Talkhīṣ al-ʿIlal al-Mutanāhiya by al-Dhahabī (p. 249), among others.

It should be noted that while some of these reports are graded ḍaʿīf (weak), others are transmitted with chains consisting only of trustworthy narrators. The scholars clarify that the first portion of this report is considered to be a statement of ʿAbdullāh ibn Masʿūd (RA). For further details, see:

islamqa.info/ar/answers/519212/هل صح حديث إنما العلم بالتعلم والحلم بالتعلم

### *10.1.4 Setting Realistic Reading Goals*

A common mistake in building a reading habit is to set goals that are either too easy to inspire or so ambitious that they quickly lead to frustration. The balance lies in keeping the target realistic while keeping the effort high.

Inspired by the great scholars of the past, we sometimes imagine that we must immediately spend hours each day with books. Yet their lives were the fruit of decades of discipline, not the starting point. For the modern reader, the lesson is not to copy their schedule, but to adopt their principle: consistent striving with purposeful discipline.

Start with a target you are confident you can achieve—ten minutes a day, a few pages before bed, or one chapter a week. Achieving these goals creates motivation and a sense of progress. At the same time, give yourself room to push beyond them. When you exceed your target, the sense of accomplishment is even greater. Over time, as you learn what is realistically sustainable, you can raise the bar gradually without falling into despair or burnout.

This approach keeps you in the zone of eustress—a healthy level of challenge that stretches your ability without breaking it. It ensures that effort is always present, while progress remains attainable.

The Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said:

اكْلَفُوا مِنَ الْعَمَلِ مَا تُطِيقُونَ فَإِنَّ خَيْرَ الْعَمَلِ أَدْوَمُهُ وَإِنْ قَلَّ

*"Take up good deeds only as much as you are able, for the best deeds are those done regularly even if they are few."* (Source: Musnad Aḥmad 8600)

Consistency preserves the habit, and effort gives it depth. Together, they transform reading from a burden into a lifelong source of strength and joy.

### *10.1.5 Keep Books Accessible*

One of the simplest yet most effective ways to encourage reading is to keep books within easy reach. Place them where your eyes naturally fall—on your nightstand, in the living room, on your desk at work, or even in your bag when you go out. The very visibility of books acts as a gentle reminder, increasing the chances that you will reach for them in moments that might otherwise be lost to idle distraction.

Do you recall the example of Imām Abū Dāwūd (رحمه الله), mentioned in chapter 3, who had a special wide sleeve sewn into his shirt to carry books with him wherever he went? Such was his commitment to always having knowledge close at hand. Similarly, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (رحمه الله) kept a book by his side for forty years, often falling asleep with it resting on his chest, surrendering to sleep only after reading. These examples remind us that when love of knowledge becomes part of our daily rhythm, books cease to be objects on a shelf and instead become constant companions in life's journey who you would never want to be separated from.

By surrounding yourself with books—whether physical or digital—you make reading a natural part of your environment. Over time, this habit transforms brief, passing moments into opportunities for growth and reflection.

### *10.1.6 Interleaving and Diversifying Reading*

One powerful method for deepening learning is **interleaving**—rotating between different topics, skills, or books instead of locking onto a single subject for long stretches. When a text begins to feel heavy or the mind grows tired, shifting to another subject, genre, or even a lighter work can refresh the heart and keep momentum alive.

Our predecessors practiced this balance. Many scholars would keep several volumes beside them at night, moving between them as needed. Some, when wearied by dense study, would request poetry to lighten their mood before returning to weightier works. This rhythm of alternating rigor with refreshment kept both the mind and spirit engaged.

Though interleaving may feel more demanding at first, it embodies what we described earlier as a "desirable difficulty." It challenges the learner in

ways that strengthen memory, sharpen the ability to distinguish between concepts, and develop the flexibility to apply knowledge across contexts.

By diversifying what we read—mixing demanding works with lighter material, and alternating between disciplines—we not only prevent boredom but also train the mind to connect ideas across fields. This balance of effort and ease is what sustains long-term focus and nurtures a lifelong love for books and learning.

### *10.1.7 Give Yourself Rest breaks*

Just as the body cannot endure constant exertion without pause, the intellect too requires rest. Scholars of the past recognized this balance and practiced it in different ways. Some would allow themselves breaks, while others—when absolutely determined to continue—would go so far as to splash water on their faces to ward off sleep and press on with renewed focus. This shows that tiredness and exhaustion are inevitable, and that the key lies in knowing when to rest and when to push forward.

It is related from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (may Allah be pleased with him):

أجموا هذه القلوب، وابتغوا لها طرائف الحكمة، فإنها تمل كما تمل الأبدان

*"Give these hearts rest, and seek for them refreshing wisdom, for they grow weary just as bodies grow weary."*[27]

This principle of rest is embedded in the philosophy of the Sharīʿah and in the very way Allah ﷻ has created us. Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (may Allah have mercy on him) explained this when discussing the wisdom behind the prohibition of voluntary prayers at certain unrestricted times. He wrote:

"Indeed, in the prohibition of prayer at certain times there are further benefits, such as giving the soul rest from the heaviness of worship, just as it is refreshed by sleep and other means. For this reason, Muʿādh R.A. said: ***'I consider my sleep as an act of devotion, just as I consider my***

[27] See: Abu Zayd, Bakr. *Ḥilyat Ṭālib al-ʿIlm* (The Adornment of the Student of Knowledge), p. 186.

***standing in prayer.'"***

In another place, he added:

"It has even been said that part of the wisdom behind the prohibition of unrestricted voluntary prayers at some times is to give the soul a break, so that it becomes more eager for prayer. When the soul is prevented from something, it yearns for it; and after rest, it engages in worship with greater energy. And Allah knows best."

This balance between exertion and rest extended to structured learning as well. Breaks for students have long been a recognized practice in Muslim societies. Such practices are well-documented in the heritage of Islamic education. Works like Ādāb al-Muʿallimīn by Sahnūn (p. 104), al-Risālah al-Mufaṣṣalah by al-Qābisī (pp. 135–137), al-Shaqāʾiq al-Nuʿmāniyyah (p. 20, cited also in Abjad al-ʿUlūm 1/195–196), Alaysa al-Ṣubḥ bi-Qarīb by al-Ṭāhir ibn ʿĀshūr, the Fatāwā of Rashīd Riḍā (p. 1212), Muʿjam al-Buldan (3/102), and the Fatāwā of Ibn Taymiyyah (25/318–320, 329) all attest to the importance of rest within the cycle of study.

The message is clear: just as exertion is necessary for mastery, so too are measured breaks. Rest restores motivation, renews energy, and allows the heart to reengage with learning more eagerly and productively.

### *10.1.8 Mindfulness and Focus*

Before opening a book, take a moment to clear the mind. Simple practices such as deep breathing, short pauses for dhikr, or silently resetting your intention help remove distractions and bring presence to your reading. When the heart and mind are calm, attention sharpens, and comprehension deepens. Approaching study with mindfulness ensures that your time with the book is not rushed or distracted, but purposeful and fruitful.

## 10.2Intellectual Preparation

Just as an athlete warms up before exercise, the seeker of knowledge should prepare the mind before engaging with a book. Reading is not a

mechanical act of moving the eyes across words; it is an intellectual and spiritual effort that requires readiness. Let us review some of the important considerations in this regard.

### *10.2.1 Begin by refreshing in your mind the purpose of reading:*

Begin by clarifying your purpose—why are you reading this book? What do you hope to gain? A clear purpose focuses the mind and sharpens attention.

### *10.2.2 Activate prior knowledge*

It also helps to activate prior knowledge. Recall what you already know about the topic, or note down questions you wish to explore. This primes the brain to connect old and new ideas, deepening comprehension.

### *10.2.3 Gain a Bird's-Eye View of the Subject*

Approaching a book without any background can feel overwhelming, like stepping into unfamiliar terrain without a map. One of the most effective ways to prepare is to first gain a bird's-eye view of the subject. The more prior knowledge you have, the easier it becomes to connect new ideas, comprehend complex discussions, and retain what you read.

In Islamic tradition, scholars often wrote madkhal (introductions) to subjects—works that provided an overview of key themes, definitions, and contexts before delving into the details. These served as intellectual gateways, orienting the student and ensuring that deeper study was purposeful and structured.

Similarly, before beginning a book today, you can build your own orientation by exploring the topic through brief research—reading introductory articles, watching explanatory videos, or discussing the subject with someone knowledgeable. Even scanning the table of contents, summaries, or related works can help you understand the framework into which the book fits.

This preparatory step not only motivates you to read but also equips you

with reference points. As a result, the book ceases to feel like a random collection of pages and instead becomes a meaningful journey where every chapter contributes to a larger picture.

### *10.2.4 Listening to Book Summaries First and Last*

Book summaries can serve as both a gateway and a review tool. Listening to a summary before starting a book gives you an overview of its structure, main arguments, and key themes, making the detailed reading more focused and purposeful. Revisiting the summary after finishing the book reinforces the core takeaways, ensuring that the most important insights remain clear in your memory. This practice frames your reading at the beginning and consolidates it at the end, strengthening both comprehension and long-term retention.

### *10.2.5 Vocabulary Building:*

Before diving into any serious reading, it is wise to strengthen your vocabulary, especially in the subject you are about to study. Expanding your word bank beforehand makes comprehension smoother and prevents constant interruptions once you begin reading. This can be done by familiarizing yourself with commonly used terms in the field, reviewing glossaries, or even listening to introductory talks that explain key concepts.

Developing a personal glossary—a simple list of terms you encounter while preparing—can serve as a reference when you begin reading the text itself. Many classical scholars emphasized mastering *luġah* (language and terminology) as a co-requisite for studying Qur'ān, ḥadīth, and other sciences. In the same spirit, equipping yourself with the right vocabulary before starting a book ensures you approach it with clarity and confidence, rather than confusion and hesitation.

## 10.3Spiritual Prepration

True knowledge is more than information—it is light placed by Allah in the heart. To receive this light, a reader must approach study with

spiritual readiness: a purified intention, reliance on duʿā, avoidance of sins, and respect for both books and teachers. When knowledge is sought with humility and acted upon sincerely, it becomes a means of guidance and transformation, not just accumulation. Let us review some of the aspects in relation to spiritual preparedness for reading.

### *10.3.1 Purifying Intention (Ikhlāṣ in Seeking Knowledge)*

Knowledge in Islam is an act of worship, and like all acts of worship, it depends on intention. The Prophet ﷺ said, *"Actions are but by intentions."* A student must examine their heart before opening a book: Is this pursuit for Allah's sake, to gain closeness to Him, and to benefit His creation? Or is it for status, argument with scholars, or worldly gain? Purifying intention transforms reading from a routine activity into an act of devotion that brings barakah and light.

### *10.3.2 Duʿā for Understanding and Retention*

A believer never relies solely on his own effort; he turns to Allah for guidance in every matter, including study. Allah Himself said regarding Prophet Sulaymān *"We granted Solomon the right understanding."* This reminds us that true comprehension is a divine gift, granted to whom Allah wills. Supplication (duʿā) is therefore one of the most effective means for resolving complex issues, untangling intellectual knots, and being guided to the correct path.

The Prophet ﷺ himself was commanded to pray:

﴿رَّبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا﴾

*"My Lord, increase me in knowledge."*

This not only highlights the Prophet's humility before Allah but also instructs the Ummah to make this duʿā regularly.

Another very beneficial supplication is:

﴿سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ﴾

*"Glory be to You! We have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, You are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise."*

By beginning study with such prayers, a student aligns intention with reliance upon Allah, reminding himself that knowledge is not just acquired through effort but gifted through divine aid and blessing.

### *10.3.3 Avoid sin*

Allah SWT linked taqwa to the attainment of true and beneficial divine knowledge. He SWT said:

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ

*"Fear Allaah, and Allaah will teach you."* [Al-Baqarah 2:282]

This is a timeless lesson our Aslāf embraced and passed down to those who followed them. Imām Sufyān ibn ʿUyaynah (رحمه الله) was once asked: *"How did you strengthen your memory?"* He replied: *"By refraining from sins."* (Shuʿab al-Īmān, vol. 5, p. 24, 1435H).

The same lesson is echoed in the famous words of Imām al-Shāfiʿī (رحمه الله), who said in poetry:

شكوتُ إلى وَكيعٍ سُوءَ حِفظي

فأرشدَني إلى تَركِ المَعاصي

وأخبرَني بأَنَّ العِلمَ نُورٌ

ونورُ اللهِ لا يُؤتى لِعاصي

*"I complained to my teacher Wakīʿ about the weakness of my memory.*
*He directed me to abandon sins.*
*He told me that knowledge is a light,*

*and the light of Allah is not given to a sinner."*[28]

Sin darkens the heart and blocks receptivity to divine knowledge. While one may still read and memorize, the *nūr* (light) of knowledge—its depth, insight, and transformative power—requires purity of heart and avoidance of disobedience. Guarding the eyes, the tongue, and one's thoughts is thus a form of preparation for study.

And when Allah grants understanding, the student must meet it with gratitude, for Allah has promised:

﴿لَئِن شَكَرْتُمْ لَأَزِيدَنَّكُمْ﴾

*"If you are grateful, I will surely increase you [in blessings]."* (Qur'ān 14:7).

### *10.3.4 Avoid bad company*

It is among the hallmarks of sincere seekers of knowledge that they distance themselves from harmful company, thereby safeguarding their time, intellect, focus, and moral integrity. Listening to idle talk exacts a subtle but real toll on the mind. One ought instead to preserve oneself for the pursuit of beneficial knowledge. As Allah, Exalted is He, said:

وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا اللَّغْوَ أَعْرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَقَالُوا لَنَا أَعْمَالُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ لَا نَبْتَغِي الْجَاهِلِينَ

*When they hear vain talk, they withdraw from it saying: "Our deeds are for us and yours for you; peace be on to you: we do not desire the way of ignorant".*
(Al-Qasas 28:55)

### *10.3.5 Guard your senses, your body and your mind*

A seeker of knowledge must hold himself accountable for his words, glances, thoughts, and steps—guarding them from forbidden speech, forbidden sight, forbidden listening, forbidden walking, forbidden

---

[28] See: Al-Jarallah, Abdullah bin Jarallah bin Ibrahim. *Ahamiyyat al-Qirāʾah wa Fawāʾiduhā* (The Importance of Reading and Its Benefits), Vol. 1, p. 19. Jāmiʿ al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah

striking, and forbidden eating and drinking. He should safeguard his tongue with the remembrance of Allah and his limbs through obedience to Allah, so that he may earn goodness through them and steer them away from evil. Allah the Exalted said:

قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَٰلِكَ أَزْكَىٰ لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ

*"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Indeed, Allah is All-Aware of what they do."* [An-Nūr: 30]

And it is reported:

النظرةُ سهمٌ مسمومٌ من سهامِ إبليسَ من تركَه خوفًا من اللهِ آتاهُ اللهُ إيمانًا يجدُ حلاوتَه في قلبِه

*"The gaze is a poisoned arrow from the arrows of Iblīs. Whoever abandons it for the sake of Allah, Allah will grant him a faith whose sweetness he will taste in his heart." (Musnad Shihab 292 – Daif)*

Indeed, occupying these senses and limbs with obedience to Allah is a means of turning away from what He has forbidden—and in that lie great benefits.

### *10.3.6 Seeking Barakah through Adab with Books and Teachers*

Islamic tradition emphasizes *adab* (etiquette) as a key to benefiting from knowledge. Respecting books—handling them with cleanliness, not placing them on the ground unnecessarily, beginning with "Bismillah"—instills reverence for what they contain. Likewise, humility and respect towards teachers open doors of wisdom that raw intelligence cannot access. Many scholars testified that they gained more from the adab of their teachers than from their words. Observing these manners brings barakah and ensures that knowledge penetrates the heart, not just the mind.

### *10.3.7 Balancing Knowledge with ʿAmal (Practice)*

Knowledge that is not practiced is a burden, not a blessing. The

Companions (رضي الله عنهم) would not move to the next ten verses of the Qur'an until they had understood and acted upon the previous ten. Similarly, every book or subject studied should inspire reflection and application, however small. Implementing knowledge preserves it, whereas neglecting practice leads to forgetfulness and hardness of heart. Reading, therefore, should always be accompanied by a resolve to live by what one learns.

## 10.4Physical Preparation

The body is the vessel through which the mind learns. Just as a weak body struggles with worship, a neglected body hinders concentration and retention in study. Proper rest, nutrition, posture, and mindful care create the physical conditions that allow knowledge to be absorbed with clarity and energy.

### *10.4.1 Have Adequate Sleep:*

Sleep plays a vital role in learning. Scientists have shown that during sleep, the brain strengthens and organizes the knowledge gained during the day, turning it into lasting memory. In fact, reviewing material before bedtime often improves recall the next day, because the mind continues processing it during rest. A consistent sleep routine not only boosts memory but also sharpens focus, problem-solving, and creativity—making study more effective and sustainable.

### *10.4.2 Healthy Diet and Exercise:*

A strong mind rests on a healthy body. Regular exercise boosts blood flow to the brain, improving memory, focus, and overall cognitive function. Even a daily walk or light physical activity can sharpen the mind and reduce stress.

Nutrition is equally critical. Certain foods are proven to support learning and memory:

- **Fatty fish** (salmon, mackerel) supply omega-3s essential for brain

health.

- **Berries** are rich in antioxidants that protect memory.
- **Nuts and seeds**, especially walnuts, provide vitamin E and healthy fats for sharper thinking.
- **Leafy greens** like spinach and kale enhance cognitive resilience.
- **Whole grains** give a steady supply of energy to the brain.

Hydration is just as important—dehydration, even mild, can reduce concentration and recall.

In short, eating wisely and staying active not only safeguard physical health but also create the optimal conditions for the heart and mind to absorb and retain knowledge.

### *10.4.3 Good Lighting*

Good lighting is essential for effective reading. Dim or harsh light strains the eyes, causes discomfort, and weakens focus. Natural daylight is best when available, as it is gentle on the eyes and helps maintain alertness. At night, choose a warm, steady lamp positioned behind or beside you, rather than directly overhead or in your line of sight.

For digital reading, screen brightness should be adjusted to match the surrounding light — not too bright to cause glare, nor too dim to force the eyes to strain. Many devices now offer "night mode" or blue-light filters, which can reduce fatigue during extended sessions. Just as with physical books, the goal is to create an environment where the eyes remain comfortable and focused.

### *10.4.4 Ergonomics*

Discomfort in the body quickly unsettles the mind. A strained back, bent neck, or cluttered desk can drain energy and shorten study sessions. To keep focus steady, the reading posture and environment need to support rather than fight against you.

Sit with your back supported, shoulders relaxed, and feet flat on the floor. Keep the book or screen at eye level so you are not constantly bending forward. Adjust font size and screen tilt when reading digitally to reduce strain, and pair this with proper lighting so the eyes remain comfortable.

Short breaks for stretching or resting the eyes help the body recover and the mind stay alert. Even small adjustments — the height of the chair, the distance of the book, the orderliness of the desk — contribute to whether reading feels tiring or natural. When the body is settled, the heart and mind are free to concentrate fully on knowledge.

### *10.4.5 The Best Times to Read*

The question of when to read is almost as important as what to read. Our ability to concentrate and retain knowledge rises and falls throughout the day, shaped by sleep, energy, diet, and other factors. While personal preference plays a role, research in cognitive science offers helpful insights into times when the mind is naturally most receptive.

For many, mornings are the most fruitful hours. After a night of rest, the brain is refreshed, alert, and more capable of grasping complex ideas.

Studies on memory and attention confirm that mornings are often the peak time for tasks that require focus and comprehension. This is why scholars of the past often reserved the early hours for reading and writing, benefiting not only from mental freshness but also from the barakah of beginning the day with knowledge. Why would this barakah not be there when the Prophet ﷺ himself prayed for it:

عَنْ صَخْرٍ الْغَامِدِيِّ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ اللَّهُمَّ بَارِكْ لِأُمَّتِي فِي بُكُورِهَا

قَالَ وَكَانَ إِذَا بَعَثَ سَرِيَّةً أَوْ جَيْشًا بَعَثَهُمْ أَوَّلَ النَّهَارِ وَكَانَ إِذَا بَعَثَ تِجَارَةً بَعَثَهُمْ أَوَّلَ النَّهَارِ فَأَثْرَى وَكَثُرَ مَالُهُ

سنن الترمذي كتاب البيوع باب ما جاء في التبكير بالتجارة 1212

*Sakhr ibn al-Ghamidi reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "O Allah, bless my nation in their early morning."*

*Sakhr said, "When the Prophet prepared a company or army, he would dispatch them at the start of the day. When he prepared a trading convoy, he would dispatch them at the start of the day and they would acquire much wealth."*

*Source: Sunan al-Tirmidhī 1212 - Hasan*

Midday, by contrast, is often marked by fatigue, especially after meals. The so-called "afternoon slump" can make it difficult to sustain attention on heavy material. However, this time need not be wasted. Lighter reading—such as summaries, reflective notes, or narratives—can still be valuable. The mind may not be at its sharpest, but revisiting previously studied material or engaging in relaxed reading helps maintain momentum. Moreover, observing the Sunnah of the afternoon nap (qaylūlah) helps restore alertness and energy, enabling one to continue the rest of the day with renewed focus and a refreshed state of mind, free from the weight of fatigue.

As the day progresses, many experience a second peak in the late afternoon or early evening. Having shaken off the midday lull, the mind regains clarity and energy. This period is often well-suited for another focused reading session, particularly for those whose schedules do not permit morning study. With some discipline, it can become one of the most productive times of day.

Evenings, however, vary greatly. For some, they remain highly productive; for others, the fatigue of the day makes it harder to concentrate. Reading in the evening may therefore be best reserved for lighter or reflective material—books that inspire, stories that calm the heart, or reviews of what has already been learned. Before bed, reading can serve as a soothing ritual. Light material helps ease the transition to sleep, while heavy, stimulating content should be avoided as it may disrupt rest. Sleep researchers also caution against reading on devices that emit blue light, as these can interfere with the body's natural rhythms. A simple physical book is often the best companion before sleep.

In the end, the best time to read is the time that aligns with both your energy and your routine. What matters most is not only finding those high points in the day but also being consistent with them. By matching complex texts with times of peak focus and saving lighter material for slower hours, reading becomes both more enjoyable and more fruitful.

### *10.4.6 Choosing the Right Medium*

The medium you choose for reading—whether digital or print—has a significant impact on focus, comprehension, and retention. Printed books often provide a tactile and distraction-free experience that helps with deeper engagement, while digital formats offer flexibility, portability, and useful features like searchability and annotation. Both have their place, but the key is to be intentional.

Studies have shown that screen reading can sometimes reduce comprehension, particularly when scrolling encourages skimming rather than careful reading. To counter this, digital reading should be approached with discipline: use annotation tools, highlight key points, and disable notifications to maintain concentration. On the other hand, physical books can foster immersion and long-term retention, making them especially valuable for complex or demanding material.

A balanced approach works best. Use digital platforms for quick access, portability, and notes, but rely on print when depth, focus, and sustained comprehension are needed. Consciously adapting your strategies to the chosen medium ensures that reading remains both effective and enjoyable, regardless of the format.

### *10.4.7 Contextual Variation*

The setting in which you read can significantly affect both focus and memory. Whenever possible, seek natural surroundings—quiet places among trees, by the ocean, or on a hillside. The calmness of such environments not only refreshes the mind but also helps ideas settle more deeply into memory. Modern research also suggests that varying your study environment can strengthen recall, as the brain associates

information with different contexts, making it easier to retrieve later.

At the same time, there is value in consistency. For some, a familiar place may act as a trigger that immediately puts the mind into "reading mode." If you find a setting that consistently nurtures focus—such as a quiet corner in your home, a masjid library, or a favorite study spot—it can become an anchor for concentration.

Personal preferences will differ. I, for example, have found great joy and clarity in reading alone on a hill or beneath the shade of thick trees, away from distractions. Others may discover their best setting elsewhere. The important point is to be mindful of how your environment affects your engagement with books and to choose or vary it with purpose.

# 11. Reading to Retain

Has it ever happened that you pick up a book you once read, only to realize that nothing feels familiar? You can't recall the arguments, the lessons, or even the main theme of the book. Many readers face this frustration—not because they lack ability, but because they did not use the strategies that transform reading into lasting memory. Without deliberate techniques, the knowledge slips away, leaving no thread to hold onto once the last page is turned.

This chapter is designed to address that challenge. It outlines practical methods to strengthen retention—approaches that help you not only understand what you read but also remember, recall, and apply it later.

- We begin the chapter with **contextual understanding**, learning to grasp the background, intent, and circumstances in which a book was written.
- From there, we move to **the process of reading**, where practical tools such as note-taking, summarizing, and skimming come into play.
- The third section, **gaining comprehension**, explores how to understand arguments, connect ideas, and weave them into a coherent mental narrative.
- Next, we discuss **techniques for recall**—visualization, mnemonic devices, and other practices that strengthen memory retrieval.
- We then highlight the value of **comparative studies**, where examining different works on a theme sharpens insight and deepens understanding.
- Finally, we turn to **consolidating knowledge**, ensuring learning is cemented through active recall, paced review, teaching others, and practical application.

Together, these six approaches form a holistic strategy—not only for reading, but for retaining, internalizing, and living the knowledge we

acquire. The aim is to ensure that every book you read leaves a lasting imprint on your understanding and becomes a meaningful part of your life.

## 11.1Contextual Understanding

Understanding a book begins with understanding its context. No work is written in isolation; every author is shaped by their background, their era, and the intellectual or social climate of their time. Ask yourself: What situation in history produced this text? What challenges or debates was the author responding to? Was there a particular school of thought or movement that influenced them? These questions anchor the book in reality and prevent you from interpreting it in a vacuum.

Context also includes examining the author's intentions and potential biases. What purpose did they hope to achieve by writing this work? Did they attempt to eliminate bias in their arguments, or were they clearly writing from within a particular framework? Looking into the sources they relied upon, and why they may have chosen them, offers further insight into both the strength and the limitations of their work. Moreover, paying attention to how other scholars—both contemporaries and later critics—have assessed the author helps place the book within the broader intellectual tradition.

This kind of contextual awareness transforms the way we read. Instead of focusing narrowly on sentences or words, you begin to see the bigger picture: the author's aims, the logic of their arguments, and how the work fits into an ongoing conversation across history. Such a method deepens comprehension, guards against misinterpretation, and cultivates a more critical and informed engagement with texts.

However, a word of caution is necessary here. Do not become fixated on the outcomes of your initial research into contextual factors. Remember that your early impressions may be incomplete—or even incorrect—because you might not yet have encountered a critical piece of information that could shift your understanding entirely. Approach these

initial conclusions as working hypotheses, not established facts. Remain open to revising them as you progress through the book and even afterward, allowing your perspective to mature with deeper reading and broader exposure.

## 11.2The process of reading:

Once you have reflected on the contextual factors and are ready to begin reading, certain techniques can make the process far more effective. This section outlines approaches that help you grasp the essence of a book quickly, strategies to plan your reading with focus, and—most importantly—the art of note-taking. Together, these methods ensure that your time with a book is not just spent turning pages, but actively engaging with ideas in a way that strengthens understanding and retention.

### *11.2.1 Previewing and Skimming:*

Before engaging in detailed reading, it is useful to begin with previewing and skimming. In Chapter 9, we briefly mentioned how this practice saves time and helps set direction. Here we expand on that idea and explain it with some additional details. This step allows the reader to quickly grasp the overall structure of a text—its key ideas, organization, and flow of arguments—so that subsequent reading becomes more focused and productive.

By scanning headings, subheadings, introductions, and conclusions, one develops a mental map of the material and begins to see how the argument is built. Skimming also involves noting recurring words and phrases that point to central themes. This primes the mind to recognize patterns and concentrate on what truly matters when engaging more deeply with the text.

At times, skimming also serves as a practical tool for quickly locating specific information, especially in technical or reference works. In short, previewing and skimming serve as a roadmap: they sharpen focus, save time, and turn reading from a blind effort into a purposeful journey.

### *11.2.2 Chunking the Book*

One of the most effective ways to approach a book is to break it into smaller, manageable sections. Instead of treating a text as one long, overwhelming block, divide it into chapters, themes, or even page ranges that can be comfortably read and absorbed in a sitting. This makes the task less daunting and allows the mind to process information in stages.

Psychologists call this *chunking*—the same principle that makes it easier to remember a phone number when divided into parts rather than as one long sequence. Applied to reading, chunking helps with focus, pacing, and retention. By pausing after each chunk to reflect or review, you give your memory a chance to consolidate what you've learned before moving forward.

The goal is not to rush through the book, but to digest it piece by piece. Over time, these smaller chunks combine into a clearer and more lasting understanding of the whole work.

### *11.2.3 Engage Multiple Senses*

The more senses you involve in your reading, the more firmly knowledge settles in memory. Reading aloud, for instance, activates both your visual and auditory senses, reinforcing what you take in. Pairing a text with an audiobook can also be helpful when available and practical—but it should be used mindfully. Unless you pause to reflect on key ideas, the continuous flow of audio may hinder deep understanding rather than enhance it.

Writing notes by hand is another powerful technique. Research consistently shows that handwriting engages the brain more fully than typing, helping to encode information at a deeper level. Scholars of the past would often copy entire books by hand, a process that naturally combined several layers of reinforcement. To write, you must first look at the line with your eyes, recall it from memory, and then reproduce it with your hand. In doing so, vision, recall, and movement all converge, anchoring the knowledge in both mind and body. The physical act of

forming words also slows you down just enough to process ideas deeply, rather than skimming past them.

By combining these approaches—seeing, hearing, speaking, and writing—you transform reading from a passive act into an active, multi-sensory process that strengthens both retention and understanding.

It is remarkable how Allah ﷻ has built these supports into our very nature. With a little reflection, many people instinctively discover them and use in their benefit: some naturally read aloud when they wish to memorize, others jot down what they want to retain, and some record and replay their own notes. These tendencies reflect the innate fitrah that Allah ﷻ has blessed us with—an inbuilt guidance that, when harnessed with intention, makes the pursuit of knowledge all the more fruitful.

### *11.2.4 Taking Notes*

#### *Advice from the scholars about taking notes:*

The scholars of the past placed immense value on recording what they learned.

- They would say, *"The student must have a notebook in which he writes, whether standing or walking."*
- **Al-Shaʿbī** advised, *"If you hear something, then write it down – even on a wall."*
- Their vast works—like **Ibn al-Qayyim**'s *Badāʾiʿ al-Fawāʾid* or **Ibn al-Jawzī**'s *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*—are themselves collections of insights, reflections, and observations captured during study and preserved for future generations.
- **Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad** remarked, *"Whoever memorizes relies on escape, but whoever writes secures it."*

These sayings underline a simple truth: memory can fade, but what is written remains.

#### *Note-taking as a Formative Engine of Islamic Thought*

The practice of recording knowledge has always played a decisive role in preserving and transmitting Islam. What begins as a fleeting moment of speech, reflection, or study often lives on through notes—carefully taken, compiled, and refined—until it shapes generations. Our intellectual heritage itself testifies to the transformative power of note-taking.

The story begins with the Qurʾān itself. As the Prophet ﷺ recited, his Companions wrote—preserving revelation on prepared materials and committing it to memory. Those written pieces and parchments were then gathered and ordered into codices, so that the ummah received the Qurʾān not as scattered fragments but as a unified muṣḥaf that could be navigated, taught, and transmitted with precision.

Alongside this stood the recording of the Sunnah. The Companions not only memorized what they heard from the Prophet ﷺ; some also kept ṣuḥuf (personal notebooks). Writing was permitted in specific instances, and these early notes, together with continuous oral transmission, became the raw material later organized into the great ḥadīth collections. In this way, purposeful note-taking safeguarded the Prophet's guidance for the ummah and made systematic study possible.

A third current runs through the works of later scholars. Many of the books we rely on today—tafsīr, ḥadīth commentary, usūl, reflections—began as journals, study notes, articles, reflection, and research summaries. By recording observations methodically, refining them over time, and compiling them as books, scholars preserved their own learning and multiplied its benefit for generations.

A fourth strand is the role of students. Across the centuries, countless lectures, durūs, and public lessons were captured by attentive pupils, transcribed, edited, and then published.

> Words once heard by a small circle became books read by millions who never met those teachers nor heard their voices.

The pattern is everywhere in our literature—and it continues in the present day.

Taken together, these streams show a single truth: **note-taking has been a formative engine of Islamic thought**. From revelation to ḥadīth, from a scholar's private notebook to a student's transcript, careful recording turned fleeting moments of learning into enduring works. When we, too, capture insights systematically—organizing, reviewing, and refining them—we do more than preserve our own progress; we contribute to a living chain that carries knowledge forward.

### *How should this be done?*

The following techniques can be very useful:

- Begin by keeping a dedicated notebook or folder for your readings. As you progress through a book, mark key points and then re-express them briefly in your own words. This not only fixes them in your memory but also forces you to process the ideas actively rather than passively copying.
- When something is unclear, write a question in the margin or in your notes, and make it a point to revisit it later—through further reading, reflection, or by asking a teacher.
- At the close of each section or chapter, jot down a short summary capturing its central lessons.
- It also helps to create a set of simple symbols for quick review: a ★ for what is most important, a ? for what needs clarification, or an → to signal a link to another idea. With time, these markings form a personal shorthand that makes revision faster and more meaningful.

The aim is not to reproduce the book word for word, but to distill its essence—what you understood, what challenged you, and what you wish to act upon. Over time, your notebook becomes more than a record; it becomes a treasure chest of insights, a tool for revision, a resource to share with others, and a lifelong companion in your journey of learning.

## 11.3Gaining comprehension:

Now we come to what can truly be called the heart of this journey: extracting wisdom from books. Reading is not complete until its lessons are drawn out, understood, and connected. The first step in this process is to grasp the author's arguments with clarity. Often, a book will advance several points orbiting a central theme; these must be gathered and organized into a coherent whole.

From there, the effort deepens—linking those arguments with one another, and then with what you already know from other readings and the teachings of scholars. In this way, a book no longer stands in isolation; it becomes part of a larger web of meaning that you are continuously weaving for yourself.

Here I wish to highlight a valuable lesson I learned from my teachers Dr. Jasser Auda and Sir Salman Asif Siddiqui: true beneficial knowledge is knowledge that is connected. Every piece of it should link to the broader whole. If something stands isolated, with no relation to the bigger picture of beneficial knowledge, then its value remains limited. This perspective invites us to always seek meaning in context and to weave each idea into the wider tapestry of understanding. It is through this connectedness that knowledge blossoms into wisdom.

With this foundation in mind, we will now turn to practical techniques that can help us comprehend more deeply and cultivate a coherent framework of knowledge—so that reading does not remain a mechanical act, but becomes a source of insight and transformation.

### *11.3.1 Ask Questions:*

In order to ahieve your comprehension goals, approach every book with an active, questioning mindset. Reading should not be a passive act of receiving words; it should be a dialogue with the text. As you read, ask yourself:

- *How does this information serve the purpose and objective of my reading?*
- *What is the central idea being conveyed?*
- *How does it connect with what I already know?*

- *What are its practical implications?*
- *What alternative perspectives exist?*
- *How does it fit into the broader web of meaning I am building in my mind?*

By framing such questions, you move beyond the surface of the text and begin to engage with the author's reasoning. This transforms reading from a mechanical process into a deliberate search for insight, where every argument is weighed, connected, and situated within a larger framework of knowledge.

A simple yet effective tip in this regard would be to turn chapter titles, headings, and subheadings into questions before you begin reading them. This primes your mind to look for answers as you progress, sharpening your focus. After completing a section, pause and test yourself by recalling and restating the answers to your questions. This not only strengthens memory but also ensures you are genuinely grasping the arguments rather than letting them wash over you.

### 11.3.2 *Dealing with Ambiguity in Reading*

While reading, it is natural to encounter passages that seem unclear or difficult to grasp. Not every statement in a book will immediately yield its meaning to every reader. When this happens, the best approach is patience and humility. Note down the points that are confusing and ask someone knowledgeable rather than attempting to force an interpretation on your own. The Qurʾān itself commands:

فَسْـَٔلُوٓاْ أَهْلَ ٱلذِّكْرِ إِن كُنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

*"So ask the people of knowledge if you do not know."* (Sūrah al-Naḥl 16:43)

The Prophet ﷺ also emphasized this principle when he said:

إِنَّمَا شِفَاءُ الْعِيِّ السُّؤَالُ

*"The cure for not knowing is to ask."*( Sunan Abī Dāwūd 336 - Saheeh)

We see questions as a close ally of scholars, as the following report illustrates.

أن معاوية رضي الله عنه أرسل إلى دغفل فسأله عن العربية وعن أنساب الناس ، وسأله عن النجوم ، فإذا [هو] عالم فقال : يا دغفل من أين حفظت هذا ؟ فقال : " حفظت هذا بلسان سئول وقلب عقول وإن آفة العلم النسيان "

*Muʿāwiya (may Allah be pleased with him) once sent for Dughfal and asked him about the Arabic language, about the genealogies of people, and about the stars. He found him to be knowledgeable. So he said: "O Dughfal, from where did you preserve all of this?" He replied: "I preserved it with a questioning tongue and an intelligent heart. And indeed, the affliction of knowledge is forgetfulness."* (Al-Muajjam Al-Kabir 4201)

At times, however, even the scholars themselves found certain issues challenging. Their response was not speculation but turning to Allah for help. Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (رحمه الله), for instance, was known to make duʿā whenever a complex matter became difficult. Among the supplications he recited was:

"يَا مُعَلِّمَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَلِّمْنِي، وَيَا مُفَهِّمَ سُلَيْمَانَ فَهِّمْنِي"

*O Teacher of Ibrāhīm, teach me. O One who granted Sulaymān understanding, grant me understanding.* (Fataawa Ibn Taymiyyah, 4/38)

Other beneficial supplications include:

"رَبِّ يَسِّرْ وَلَا تُعَسِّرْ وَتَمِّمْ بِالْخَيْرِ"

*O Lord, make it easy, do not make it difficult, and complete it with goodness.*

The lesson is clear: when faced with difficulty in understanding, turn to Allah in sincere supplication and seek clarification from people of knowledge. This twofold approach ensures that our pursuit of understanding remains guided by faith, grounded in humility, and firmly

rooted upon the straight path.

### *11.3.3 Simplify the Concepts:*

After reading a passage, try to restate it in plain language. Explaining it as if to a child or a beginner forces you to extract the essence of the idea and test your own grasp. If you struggle to explain it simply, it usually means your understanding is incomplete. This method clarifies complex ideas and ensures they settle firmly in your mind.

### *11.3.4 Create Examples*

Abstract ideas settle into memory when tied to concrete illustrations. After reading a passage, invent examples from daily life, history, or personal experiences that reflect the concept. This makes the material easier to recall and demonstrates whether you truly understand it. We will talk more about it in section 11.4 in sha Allah.

Explaining a theory to a child, or teaching a friend with a simple example, is often the best test of comprehension. By combining clear summaries with vivid examples, you transform reading into an active process of learning and teaching — ensuring that the knowledge you gain is both understood and ready to be applied.

### *11.3.5 Identify and Analyze Arguments*

Every serious book contains arguments—claims backed by reasoning and evidence. Your task is to recognize the author's main thesis, the supporting arguments, and the logical flow between them. Distinguish major points from minor ones, watch for assumptions, and consider counterarguments. This habit not only deepens comprehension but also sharpens critical thinking and protects against accepting weak claims uncritically.

### *11.3.6 Summarize as You Read*

Instead of racing through pages, pause regularly to restate what you've just learned in your own words. This exercise compels you to test your

understanding, distinguish key ideas from supporting details, and engage actively with the text. Often, an entire chapter can be distilled into just a few sentences or a short paragraph when expressed clearly. If you get stuck or notice gaps in your explanation, return to your notes or revisit the text until the idea becomes clear. These small summaries — whether in journals, marginal notes, or personal reflections — not only strengthen retention but also create a ready reference that can be reviewed in minutes instead of hours.

Some readers even challenge themselves to condense an entire book onto a single blank sheet of paper, phrasing it as if explaining to someone unfamiliar with the subject. We have tried this technique ourselves—for instance, with iCAN Sama-O-Basr's publication Zakat-ul-Fitr—and found it remarkably beneficial. What originally required about two hundred pages to explain was effectively captured on just a couple of pages in visual summary. To revisit and refresh one's understanding, those two pages proved to be an excellent tool.

### *11.3.7 Group Related Concepts*

When reading, ideas might appear scattered across pages, chapters, or even entire books. To make sense of them, it is useful to group related concepts together. Organizing knowledge into categories or clusters allows the mind to see connections more clearly and prevents important ideas from being lost in isolation. This method also makes recall much easier because the brain naturally remembers information that is structured and chunked together. For example, when studying a book with multiple arguments around a central theme, grouping them ensures that the overall message does not fragment into unrelated parts. Instead, the mind builds an orderly map of ideas.

### *11.3.8 Build a Coherent Narrative*

Knowledge becomes truly powerful when it is woven into a coherent narrative. Grouping related concepts supplies the "scenes" of the story; narrative links them into a sequence with direction and purpose. For

example, when studying a book with multiple arguments around a central theme, clustering the arguments prevents fragmentation, while narrative-building explains how each cluster contributes to the overall message.

This is particularly important for students, teachers, and researchers who must eventually present arguments or write papers. A narrative helps you see not only what the author said, but also how each point leads into the next. It transforms reading into story-building, which the human mind naturally finds easier to grasp and remember.

You can think of each subject or book as a "knowledge tree." Grouping concepts organizes the branches into recognizable clusters, while narrative connects them back to the trunk—core ideas and principles—so the tree grows as one living whole.

### *11.3.9 Make Connections*

If each book or subject can be seen as a tree—with its main ideas forming the trunk and details spreading as branches—then true learning comes when these trees connect to one another. Linking a branch from one tree to another transforms isolated knowledge into a living forest where life thrives. For example, a historical principle may explain a philosophical argument, or a scientific discovery may enrich your understanding of social issues or spirituality. Each time a new idea reminds you of another, pause and write down the connection. These links form pathways between trees, strengthening recall and allowing insights to grow together rather than remain scattered.

The mind retains knowledge best when new material is tied to what is already familiar. Whenever you come across a new concept, ask yourself: *How does this connect to the trees I already have?* These links might be with personal experiences, previous readings, or broader themes. Historical events, for instance, become vivid when connected with present-day issues, while technical subjects such as chemistry or physics are far easier to grasp when tied to real-life examples. Analogies and metaphors further

help in building bridges between trees, turning abstract concepts into something concrete. Over time, this practice transforms disconnected information into an integrated forest of wisdom that is easier to recall and far more impactful.

## 11.4Tools for Retaining and Recalling Knowledge

Remembering what we read is not just about effort — it's about using the mind the way it was designed. Our memory thrives on structure, patterns, images, and connections. When information is shaped into these forms, it shifts from being fleeting words on a page to lasting knowledge in the heart and mind.

In this section, we explore three powerful tools for memory: mnemonic devices, which turn scattered information into simple patterns; visualization and imagination, which bring knowledge alive through images and emotions; and mental models and mindmaps, which give structure to ideas and reveal the connections between them. Together, these methods make learning more active, meaningful, and enduring.

### *11.4.1 Mnemonic Devices: Patterns That Stick*

The mind remembers best when information is given a clear structure. Mnemonic techniques provide this structure, turning scattered knowledge into organized patterns that the memory can easily retrieve.

One of the most practical examples is the use of acronyms or acrostics. A familiar case is SMART goals — Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound. A single, simple word becomes a framework that carries an entire system of thought, making it far easier to recall and apply.

Another effective method is to shape information into rhymes or songs. Rhythm and melody act like mental hooks, making ideas far less likely to slip away. This practice is not new. Many classical scholars composed important texts in verse form to make them easier for students to memorize, and the tradition continues today. One of the finest teachers of

Arabic in recent times, Br. Asif Mehrali — whose course on the Madinah Arabic books has benefitted learners across the world — converted many Arabic grammar rules and tables into memorable poems and songs. As I write this, some of his verses and grammar songs echo in my mind. May Allah ﷻ raise his ranks in Jannah.

Though these tools may appear simple, their power should not be underestimated. When faced with sequences, lists, or layered concepts that resist ordinary memory, a well-crafted mnemonic can transform the difficult into the unforgettable.

### *11.4.2 Visualization and Imagination: Making Knowledge Come Alive*

Our minds are wired for pictures — turn what you read into scenes you can see. When studying, don't just pass over the words; *see* them. If you are reading about a historical event, imagine the place, the people, the atmosphere, even the emotions involved. The richer the scene, the stronger the memory.

We find this truth reflected in the Qur'an's own style of teaching. Through its parables, similes, and vivid examples, the Qur'an stirs the imagination so that its message takes root in the heart. The mind holds on to images and associations far more easily than to abstract words, and the Qur'an demonstrates this with pictures that engrave meaning deep within.

For example, Allah ﷻ says:

فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُ صَلْدًا

*"The example is like a smooth rock covered with soil, then a heavy rain falls upon it, leaving it bare."* (Qur'an 2:264)

False charity is here compared to soil on a rock — easily washed away, leaving nothing behind. One can almost see the rain striking, the soil disappearing, and the hard stone exposed. Nothing beneficial can grow from it. The image captures the emptiness of good deeds without sincerity

far more powerfully than plain description ever could.

Another example comes in Allah's description of salvation from disbelief:

وَٱعْتَصِمُوا۟ بِحَبْلِ ٱللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا۟ ۚ وَٱذْكُرُوا۟ نِعْمَتَ ٱللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنتُمْ أَعْدَآءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُم بِنِعْمَتِهِۦٓ إِخْوَٰنًا وَكُنتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِّنَ ٱلنَّارِ فَأَنقَذَكُم مِّنْهَا ۗ كَذَٰلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ ٱللَّهُ لَكُمْ ءَايَٰتِهِۦ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ ١٠٣

*"And hold firmly together to the rope of Allah[1] and do not be divided. Remember Allah's favour upon you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts, so you – by His grace – became brothers. And you were at the brink of a fiery pit and He saved you from it. This is how Allah makes His revelations clear to you, so that you may be ˹rightly˺ guided."* (Qur'an 3:103)

The picture is of people dangling at the very edge of a blazing pit, only to be pulled back to safety. This awakens feelings of fear, gratitude, and love for the One who rescued them. The heart doesn't just understand salvation and being guided to Islam — it *feels* it.

Likewise, the Qur'an often draws on the imagery of cultivation and growth. For example, Allah SWT says:

مَّثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمْوَٰلَهُمْ فِى سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنۢبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلَ فِى كُلِّ سُنۢبُلَةٍ مِّا۟ئَةُ حَبَّةٍ

*"The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven ears; in every ear is a hundred grains."* (Qur'an 2:261)

Here, one can picture the farmer's field, the stalks multiplying, the joy and peace in his heart as he sees his crops flourish. In the same way, the believer's charity grows and multiplies, bringing contentment to the soul.

Such images do not merely inform — they imprint. They tie knowledge to sight, feeling, and experience, ensuring that the message is not only understood but remembered and cherished.

The same principle applies in everyday learning. When concepts are linked with pictures or mental images, they *stick*. The most effective of these are often unusual, exaggerated, or even humorous, because our memories are drawn to the strange and striking far more than to the ordinary.

This can be observed clearly in educational settings. In one of our recent Arabic classes, students were studying exceptional feminine nouns — words that do not follow the usual grammatical rules but are considered feminine simply by convention. To make them memorable, one of the co-facilitators created a painting that included all those objects together. Students looked at the picture, discussed what they saw, and then memorized it as a whole. Whenever they recalled that painting, the entire list of relevant nouns came back instantly. What could have been a dry set of rules turned into a lively visual memory, and the recall was effortless.

Visualization, hence, is far more than a trick; it is a way of making learning active. When imagination is engaged, knowledge moves from the page into the mind's eye — and from there, it becomes far harder to forget.

### *11.4.3 Mental Models and Mindmaps*

Earlier, we discussed how knowledge begins to take shape in the mind as you read — by noticing the roots, trunks, and branches of ideas and how they connect. We encouraged you to capture this in your notes. Even as you write, your mind is already sketching a picture: linking concepts, grouping details, and forming pathways between themes.

The next step is to make that inner picture visible and structured. This is where mental models and mindmaps come in. A mental model is the internal framework your mind builds as you understand something. These models act as internal maps, showing the relationships between ideas and making it easier to connect new knowledge with what you already know. Without them, information remains scattered; with them, meaning emerges.

A mindmap is the external reflection of this process on paper. Unlike

ordinary notes that run in straight lines, a mindmap begins with a central idea and branches outward, forming a web of related concepts. This mirrors the way the brain itself stores knowledge — not in isolation, but in networks. By laying out ideas in this way, patterns become clear, connections stand out, and memory retention improves.

If visualization helps us see ideas, mental models help us organize them. Our minds make sense of information by arranging it into structures — who connects to what, what leads to what, and how the pieces fit together. By placing the main idea at the center and branching outward into related points, you give clear form to what your mind had already begun to organize invisibly.

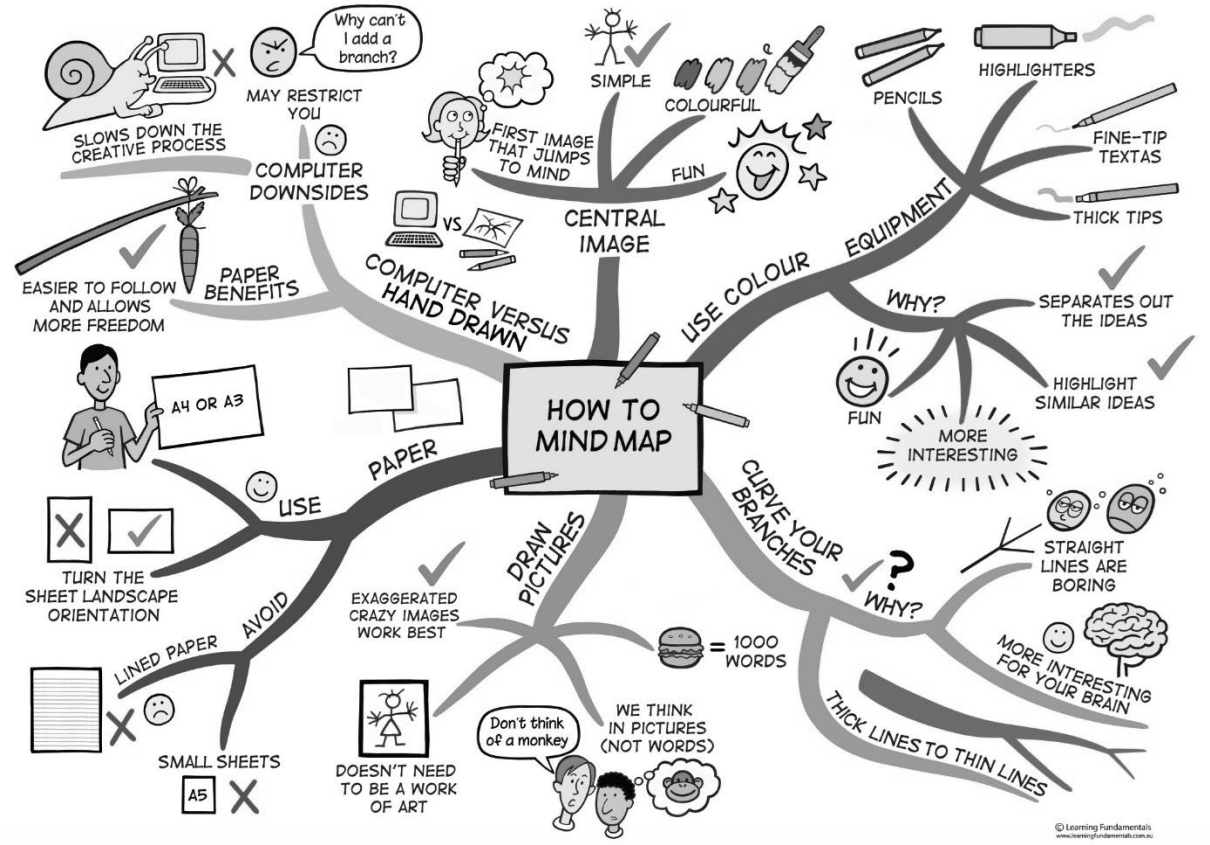



**Figure**: Example of a mindmap that summarizes how to make a mindmap

Mindmaps are especially useful for complex texts or lectures. Instead of being overwhelmed by a wall of words, learners can cluster themes, trace arguments, and see how details support the bigger picture. More than

summaries, mindmaps reveal relationships that might otherwise stay hidden. With the whole topic visible at once — core principles in the middle, details spreading outward — the subject becomes easier to grasp and far more memorable.

In this way, mindmaps build directly on what we explored earlier — moving from mental images and spontaneous connections to a structured, visual summary. From here, the ground is prepared for the next stage: weaving these structures into coherent narratives that endure.

Often, one good book is enough to build a solid foundation. Not every subject requires mastering dozens of sources, and not every reader needs to become an expert in everything. But when the goal is specialization, deeper understanding, or issuing judgments, relying on a single source is no longer sufficient.

### *11.4.4 Comparative Reading: Surrounding a Topic*

At the advanced level, true growth comes through comparative reading — studying a topic from multiple perspectives and weighing the insights of different authors. This approach allows you to see where opinions converge, where they diverge, and why those differences exist. It is the method of mujtahids in every field: jurists comparing legal opinions, doctors weighing treatment options, educators evaluating theories, and policymakers analyzing competing visions.

For researchers, this process often takes the form of a literature review: identifying the key works, examining how they relate to one another, and synthesizing them into a structured understanding. For scholars and professionals, it becomes the basis for sound judgment, since no single book or article can capture the entire truth on complex issues.

In my own studies, I have found this process invaluable. When examining a particular question, I often turn to several writers. One may highlight the historical context, another may focus on ethical lessons, while another

emphasizes spiritual dimensions. By comparing them, the result is not confusion, but clarity — a more complete picture than any single source could provide.

Comparative reading, then, is like walking around a subject. Each angle reveals details the others might miss. By combining these perspectives, the learner builds a deeper, more balanced, and more enduring understanding.

## 11.5Consolidating Knowledge

Reading alone does not guarantee retention. Many books pass before our eyes, yet their lessons slip away as quickly as they arrived. The true benefit of reading comes when knowledge is revisited, reinforced, and put into practice. This requires deliberate effort: reflecting on what has been learned, rereading key passages, actively recalling information, and engaging in discussion with others. Study circles, teaching, and linking insights to real-world situations all deepen understanding and ensure that what we read becomes part of us. In this section, we will explore practical methods to consolidate knowledge so that reading is not a fleeting activity but a lasting source of growth.

### *11.5.1 Reflect on What You've Learned:*

Finishing a chapter or book should not mark the end of the learning process. True benefit comes when we pause and reflect. Reflection transforms words on a page into insights that take root in the mind and heart. Ask yourself: What did I just learn? How does it fit within the broader body of knowledge I already hold? How can I apply it in my studies, work, or daily life?

Spending just a few minutes after each reading session to revisit key ideas cements them in memory. This may be done through summarizing in your own words, jotting down questions, or simply contemplating the relevance of the material to your goals. The scholars of the past were known not only for their immense reading but also for their deep contemplation—turning knowledge over in their minds until it became

part of their very being. Some of the Salaf are known to have spent entire nights in deep reflection over a single ḥadīth, seeking to uncover its wisdoms and subtleties.

Reflection also serves as a compass. By regularly evaluating what you read and how it benefits you, you can adjust your approach, abandon what is trivial, and devote more energy to what truly matters. As one wise saying reminds us: "Knowledge without reflection is like food without digestion." Does this not bring to mind our earlier discussion on what it truly means to 'digest' a book?"

Make reflection a habit. With each page or chapter, let your reading not only pass through your eyes but also settle in your thoughts and inspire purposeful action.

### *11.5.2 Revisiting and Reviewing Knowledge*

True learning does not happen by passing the eyes over a page once. Knowledge settles in the heart and becomes a guide for action only through repetition, review, and reflection.

Imām al-Muzanī (رحمه الله), the distinguished student of Imām al-Shāfiʿī (رحمه الله), said of one of his teacher's works:

*"I read it fifty times, and with every reading I discovered new delight, fresh benefits, and insights I had not seen before."*[29]

This is the secret of rereading: each return uncovers layers that were hidden before, either because of our own limits of understanding or because our life circumstances had not yet prepared us to grasp them. As Karl Popper wrote, "*Anything worth reading is not only worth reading twice, but worth reading again and again.*" A good book grows with you. Passages that once seemed marginal suddenly become central when read at a different stage of life.

---

[29] Al-ʿImrān, ʿAlī. *Al-Mushawwiq ilā al-Qirāʾah wa Ṭalab al-ʿIlm* (The One Who Inspires Toward Reading and Seeking Knowledge), p. 90

Nassim Taleb summarized it well: *"A good book gets better at the second reading. A great book at the third. Any book not worth rereading isn't worth reading."*

But rereading alone is not enough. The seeker of knowledge must also review and revise at deliberate intervals. Modern psychology describes this as spaced repetition—revisiting material after a day, then a few days, then a week, then a month. This method combats forgetfulness and gradually strengthens memory. Simple practices such as reviewing notes before sleep, summarizing key ideas, or discussing what you have learned with others anchor knowledge more firmly.

Ibn al-Jawzī (رحمه الله) warned in *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir*:

*"The best of things is to increase in knowledge. For whoever limits himself to what he already knows, thinking it sufficient, will become deluded by his own opinion, and his self-admiration will prevent him from benefiting. Discussion and revision with others reveal to him his mistakes."*

Therefore, the path to mastery lies in repetition, reflection, and application:

- **Repetition** through rereading and review at intervals.
- **Reflection** by pausing to ask: how does this fit into the wider body of knowledge and into my life?
- **Application** by integrating what you learn into your work, daʿwah, or daily practice.

Knowledge is a trust, and repetition is its guard. To read once is to plant a seed; to reread and review is to water it until it bears fruit.

### *11.5.3 Active Recall: Strengthening Memory Through Retrieval*

One of the most effective techniques for retaining what we read is active recall—the practice of deliberately retrieving information from memory rather than passively re-reading. Instead of looking at notes again and again, you test yourself to see what you can bring back without looking. This simple shift transforms the brain from a passive receiver into an

active participant, reinforcing memory pathways and making knowledge far more durable.

### *Why Active Recall Works*

Modern research shows that retrieval strengthens neural connections and helps consolidate information into long-term memory. Each time you struggle to recall, the memory trace grows stronger. By contrast, passive review often gives the illusion of learning—familiarity with the words—but the knowledge fades quickly. Active recall exposes what you truly know and what you have forgotten, allowing you to focus your efforts where they are most needed.

### *Practical Methods*

- **Self-Testing**: After completing a section of reading, close the book and try to summarize the key points in your own words.
- **Flashcards**: Use cards or digital tools to quiz yourself on key concepts.
- **Practice Questions**: Attempt to answer questions or solve problems without checking notes first.
- **Written Recall**: Write down everything you remember on a blank page, then return to the text to check for accuracy.
- **Discussion**: Explain what you have learned to someone else. Teaching is one of the strongest forms of active recall. We will discuss about these points in more detail.

### *In the Spirit of the Scholars*

Our predecessors understood the value of active engagement with knowledge. They repeated, tested, and debated what they learned in order to strengthen their understanding. Our Aslaf taught us that *"discussion and revision with others reveal one's mistakes,"* highlighting that knowledge must be revisited and recalled, not merely read once and left aside.

## *11.5.4 From Reading to Dialogue: Deepening Knowledge with*

### *Others*

Learning comes alive through mutual discussion. When you engage in dialogue about a concept, you are forced to clarify it in your own mind. This process not only deepens understanding but also reveals the gaps in knowledge. Summarizing key points, exchanging them with peers, or teaching them to others transforms passive reading into active engagement. Feedback from others further corrects misunderstandings and sharpens thinking.

This practice is not new. From the earliest generations, *mudhākara* (scholarly discussion) stood at the heart of learning. Mutual review with peers and colleagues yields tremendous benefits for strengthening memorization. Through repetition and revisiting what has been studied, forgotten points are recalled and knowledge is reinforced—without boredom or weariness, but in an atmosphere of energy and constructive scholarly competition.

For this reason, Ali Ibn Abi Talib R.A. said:

تزاوروا، وتذاكروا هذا الحديث، فإنكم إن لم تفعلوا يدرس علمكم

*"Visit one another and review the aḥadīth, for if you do not, your knowledge will fade away."* — Jāmiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm of Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr 626; Sharaf Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth of al-Khaṭīb 207–208; al-Jāmiʿ of al-Khaṭīb 1882–1883.

And Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī (رضي الله عنه) said:

تحدثوا، فإن الحديث يهيج الحديث

*Speak with one another, for one ḥadīth revives (or refreshes) another ḥadīth.*
— Jāmiʿ Bayān al-ʿIlm 627, 631, 639; Sharaf Aṣḥāb al-Ḥadīth 212, 214, 215; al-Jāmiʿ of al-Khaṭīb 1884–1885.

A group among the Salaf even coined a phrase that became a slogan of *mudhākara*:

إحياء الحديث مذاكرته

*Reviving ḥadīth is through its mutual review.*

— *al-Jāmiʿ* of al-Khaṭīb 1900.

Another great benefit of *mudhākara* is that it fuels praiseworthy competition among seekers of knowledge. Competing in good drives ambition toward lofty goals; without it, few would strive for excellence or aspire to honor. Al-Wazīr Ibn al-ʿAmīd once said:

ما كنت أظن أن في الدنيا حلاوة ألذ من الرئاسة والوزارة التي أنا فيها، حتى شاهدت مذاكرة سليمان بن أحمد الطبراني وأبي بكر الجعابي بحضرتي ... فوددت في مكاني أن الوزارة والرئاسة ليتها لم تكن لي وكنت الطبراني، وفرحت مثل الفرح الذي فرح به الطبراني.

*I never thought that there could be in this world a sweetness more delightful than the leadership and ministry that I held, until I witnessed the mutual review (Mudhakarah) between Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī and Abū Bakr al-Jaʿābī in my presence … Then I wished, right there, that I did not have ministry and leadership but that I were al-Ṭabarānī, and that I could rejoice with the joy that he felt.* — *al-Jāmiʿ* of al-Khaṭīb (no. 1900).

How can we build this practice with our reading? In practical terms, there are many ways to implement this today:

- **Peer Discussion**: After reading, share the main ideas with a friend or classmate. Even a brief exchange can solidify memory.
- **Study Groups:** Form small circles where everyone reads the same book or divides chapters among themselves. Each person brings insights to a joint discussion, allowing collective learning to multiply beyond what one could achieve alone.
- **Collaborative Summaries:** In some settings, each participant reads a separate book, writes a short summary, and presents it to the group. This way, the circle benefits from multiple sources while each person strengthens their skills of comprehension and expression.

The value of these methods lies not only in retaining knowledge but also in cultivating humility and cooperation. Hearing other perspectives often reveals what we might have missed on our own. As *Taʿlīm al-Mutaʿallim*

emphasizes, no student should move forward until he has revised and reinforced what he has already learned. Discussion is one of the most effective tools for that reinforcement.

By joining study circles and engaging in meaningful dialogue, you turn solitary reading into a living, breathing process. Knowledge comes alive when it is shared, tested, and debated — and it is through this exchange that it becomes firmly engraved in the heart.

### *11.5.5 Implementing Knowledge in Practice*

Reading should not remain confined to the page. Knowledge that is not applied soon fades, while knowledge that is lived becomes firmly rooted. By connecting what you read to real-world situations, you strengthen your memory and also see the relevance of your studies more vividly. Once an idea is acted upon, it not only refreshes but often expands, as real-life circumstances bring new perspectives and challenges that deepen understanding.

One effective way to achieve this is by consciously linking your reading to practical examples—whether in daily life, community interactions, or professional settings. A concept from a book might guide a decision, shape a conversation, or inspire the solution to a problem. Writing essays, journaling reflections, or applying ideas in projects further anchors knowledge in lived experience. During and after reading, revisit your notes and ask yourself: *How can this idea be lived?* Such deliberate review, reflection, and application ensure that learning is not only retained but also becomes transformative.

Of course, in today's world of vast specializations, not every piece of knowledge can be implemented directly. Yet this should not discourage us. As the Arabic proverb wisely says: *"What cannot be attained in full should not be abandoned in full."* Apply what you can, even partially, for partial benefit is far better than none.

When direct implementation is not possible, other means still preserve and expand knowledge: discussing what you have learned with peers,

teaching it to others, or sharing insights with family and community. These forms of application not only reinforce your own understanding but also spread the benefit to those around you.

The seeker of knowledge should therefore cultivate every opportunity to practice, apply, and share. In this way, knowledge is transformed from abstract information into lived wisdom that enriches both self and society. Ultimately, the goal of reading is not mere accumulation, but to embody *ʿilm al-nāfiʿ*—beneficial knowledge that bears fruit in action.

# 12. Overcoming Barriers to Effective Reading

The earlier chapters guided the reader in choosing the right books and in recognizing the different ways of approaching them. Yet even after selecting a book to read, many find it gathering dust on the shelf—sometimes after only a few pages, and sometimes without being opened at all. Why does this happen? A major reason is not lack of interest, but lack of time management and organization.

This chapter turns to that challenge. How do we carve out time for reading amidst so many demands? How do we overcome procrastination and build reading into our daily habits? The pages ahead will offer practical strategies to harness time effectively, cultivate consistency, and remove the barriers that keep us from benefiting from the very books we were eager to read.

## 12.1Overcoming Procrastination:

Procrastination is the silent thief of study. It creeps in unnoticed, steals our time, and leaves us with unfinished books and unrealized goals. A book may be chosen with enthusiasm, yet days and weeks pass without progress. Fortunately, there are practical ways to overcome this tendency and develop a disciplined, purposeful approach:

### *12.1.1 Reduce Decision Fatigue*

Every decision we make consumes mental energy. The brain, seeking to conserve that energy, forms habits. Once a habit is established, the brain no longer needs to deliberate over what to do — the routine takes over. This frees up mental energy for truly important matters.

On the other hand, if we wake up each morning asking, *"What do I need to do today?"*, we have already set ourselves up for delay. Constant micro-decisions — *Should I work out today or tomorrow? Should I reply now or later?* — slowly drain our willpower and make us more vulnerable to

procrastination.

The remedy is simple: decide in advance. Fix the days you will exercise, lay out your clothes the night before, and schedule tomorrow's most important task today. Build habits so the brain already has a "program" for when you wake, when you eat, when you exercise, and when you read. Once such routines are in place, the brain itself becomes a gentle reminder, freeing your focus for meaningful work — like deep, sustained reading.

### *12.1.2 Finish Your Day Before It Starts*

Planning is one of the simplest yet most effective antidotes to procrastination. Before going to bed, map out tomorrow. Identify:

- **One Big Thing (OBT):** the most important task you must make progress on.
- **No Matter Whats (NMWs)**: your daily non-negotiables — e.g., exercise, reading, prayer, family time.
- Any secondary tasks.

With this clarity, you wake up knowing exactly what matters most.

### *12.1.3 The "Nothing Alternative"*

One powerful way to defeat procrastination is to limit your options. Set aside a block of time — say ninety minutes — and give yourself only two choices: *read, or do nothing at all.* No scrolling, no phone, no side tasks, no distractions. Inevitably, boredom makes "nothing" unbearable, and your attention turns naturally to the book in front of you. By removing every other option, you train yourself to focus and make reading the default.

### *12.1.4 Focus on the Next Action*

Big tasks often feel overwhelming and invite procrastination. The key is to break them down into the very next small action. Instead of thinking, *"I need to finish this whole book,"* shift your focus to something simple and specific: read five pages, complete one section, or take a few notes on a single paragraph. Each small action builds momentum — and momentum is what defeats procrastination.

### *12.1.5 Shape Your Environment*

We often underestimate how strongly our environment shapes our behavior. If your phone is within reach, or notifications are buzzing, procrastination is almost guaranteed. Remove the cues: put devices in another room, disable alerts, and create a workspace that minimizes distractions. A simple rule of thumb applies: unplug before you plug in.

**Imam Ibn al-Jawzī** advised the scholars and seekers of knowledge:

ليكن لك مكان في بيتك تخلو فيه، وتحادث سطور كتبك، وتجري في حلبات فكرك

*Let there be a place in your home where you withdraw in solitude, converse with the lines of your books, and race through the arenas of your thoughts (Ṣayd al-Khāṭir, p. 318)*

As noted earlier, natural settings — quiet beaches, shaded gardens, the stillness of hills and trees — are among the most nurturing spaces for focus and reading. Alongside creating study corners within your homes, make it a habit to seek out such places for dedicated reading. The calmer the surroundings, the more naturally the mind slips into the flow of deep and sustained attention.

### *12.1.6 Recognize Fear and Resistance*

Sometimes procrastination hides deeper fears: fear of failure, of not understanding, or even of success. When it comes to reading, these fears often take subtler forms: "What if this book isn't worth my time? What if it takes too long? What if I already know what it says? What if there's a better book I should be reading instead? What if it's too scholarly or too complex for me to grasp? What if it is boring?"

Such doubts create hesitation and delay. The first step is to recognize these feelings for what they are — resistance. The second is to begin anyway, even if only for five minutes. Once you start, the weight of doubt lifts, and action itself dissolves resistance and restores confidence.

I was reminded of this once at work. My boss asked me to complete a task, and I hesitated, giving her several reasons why it might not be worth

doing. She finally asked me a simple question: "What is the risk in doing it?" I realized there was none. The same is true of reading. Nothing disastrous will happen if you open a book and begin. The world will not end if you turn a few pages. Set aside the doubts, and start reading — especially if the book aligns with your purpose and carries the possibility of benefit.

### *12.1.7 Accountability and Companionship*

Reading with others creates both structure and motivation. Share your goals with a friend, or better yet, read together in a study circle. Agree to cover one chapter, then meet to discuss it. Companionship builds healthy pressure, enriches reflection, and makes reading a shared joy rather than a solitary struggle.

### *12.1.8 Reward Progress*

Breaking procrastination is difficult, so reward matters. After completing a task or even a small step, give yourself something enjoyable: a walk, a coffee, a chat with a friend. Rewards reinforce positive habits and make the next step easier.

### *12.1.9 Final Reflection*

Procrastination may never be eliminated entirely, but it can certainly be managed, minimized, and brought under control. By reducing decision fatigue, planning ahead, breaking tasks into simple steps, shaping our environment, and confronting inner fears, we turn wasted hours into purposeful ones. Most importantly, we build the discipline that allows us to use our time as a trust — for reading, reflection, and meaningful work.

## 12.2Building a Consistent Reading Routine

As you learned in the previous section, establishing a consistent reading routine is one of the greatest keys to long-term success in learning. A fixed routine not only builds habits but also reduces the mental load of deciding *when* to read.

Choose a time when you are most alert and focused — after Fajr, during a quiet afternoon, or before bed — and make it your dedicated reading

time. By linking reading to a fixed part of your day, it becomes as natural as eating or sleeping.

The secret lies in consistency, not intensity. Reading just 10–15 pages a day may seem modest, but over months and years it produces monumental results. Lasting success is rarely the product of bursts of energy; it is born of steady persistence.

Consider the math: at 15 pages a day, you could complete a 300-page book in only 20 days. In one year, that adds up to about 18 books. Over the span of a lifetime — from the age of 15 to 65 — that pace would amount to nearly 900 books. Such is the quiet power of disciplined effort. As the proverb says:

"الوقت كالسيف إن لم تقطعه قطعك"

*Time is like a sword; if you do not cut it, it will cut you.*

Seize your time before it slips away, and let each day's small reading accumulate into a lifetime of wisdom.

## 12.3Making the Most of Idle Time

Much of our lives is lost in fragments of wasted time—moments spent waiting, commuting, scrolling on a phone, or sitting idly. Researchers estimate that in a lifespan of 60 years, nearly 20 years are spent sleeping, while thousands of additional hours are consumed in transit and trivial distractions. Dr. Ibrāhīm al-Wudāʿān, in his book *My Experience in Time Management*, notes that the average person spends nearly 1,000 hours each year commuting. Left unused, these moments quietly drain away our lives.

Yet these very intervals can become opportunities for growth if used wisely. Waiting in a queue, sitting in traffic, or passing time at airports and hospitals — all of these can be transformed into moments of learning. With today's technology, the means are plentiful: audiobooks, e-readers, podcasts, digital notes, and reading apps can place knowledge at our fingertips anytime, anywhere. Audiobooks, for example, allow us to

"read" while commuting, walking, or even exercising.

I experienced this firsthand during a period when my office commute took 45 to 50 minutes each way. On a whim, I began listening to lectures and audiobooks during the drive. What I thought would be a small experiment became a turning point: I was able to complete structured studies in *Usul al-Ḥadīth, Usul al-Tafsīr, Usul al-Fiqh,* and other subjects from multiple scholars — all during those hours on the road. Later, when I shared the idea with a friend, he told me he had completed the entire Qurʾān in audio tafsīr while commuting. Inspired by such experiences, our organization, **iCAN Sama-O-Basr** and the **Australian Islamic Library**, launched WhatsApp-based *Daurat al-Tafsīr* programs that went on to benefit thousands of participants, many of whom also tuned in during their daily commutes.

The reason I share this is simple: to encourage you to make use of such time. It may seem insignificant, but the benefits accumulate faster than you realize.

Other tools can also help sustain momentum: reading trackers, summary apps, or short digital notes keep your goals visible and progress steady. This flexibility removes the excuse of needing long, uninterrupted hours for study.

Even five minutes can add up. A German economist once compiled an entire book simply by dedicating five minutes before dinner each day! What seemed like a trivial slice of time became, through consistency, the means to complete a full volume. In the same way, those small, overlooked moments in our own lives — if invested regularly — can produce remarkable results over the years.

For the seeker of knowledge, there is no such thing as "dead time." As the scholars of the past said: *"Time is life itself; waste time and you waste life."* By training yourself to use idle moments — even if only for a few lines of reading, reviewing a lesson, or listening to a short lecture — you turn what was once lost into a steady stream of growth.

## 12.4Overcoming Digital Distractions

Among the greatest barriers to reading and focused learning today are digital distractions. Phones, social media, endless notifications, and the constant lure of entertainment consume not only our time but also fragment our attention. Modern psychology has shown that these tools are designed to hook the mind, creating habits of constant checking and shallow browsing. The result is a restless state of mind where deep, sustained focus—necessary for real learning—becomes almost impossible.

For the seeker of knowledge, this is a serious obstacle. The Qurʾān describes those who benefit from guidance as those who "listen attentively" and reflect.

ٱلَّذِينَ يَسْتَمِعُونَ ٱلْقَوْلَ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ أَحْسَنَهُۥٓ ۚ أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ ٱلَّذِينَ هَدَىٰهُمُ ٱللَّهُ ۖ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمْ أُو۟لُوا۟ ٱلْأَلْبَٰبِ

*"Those who listen closely to what is said and follow the best of it — they are the ones whom Allah has guided, and they are the people of understanding."* (Az-Zumar 39:18)

A distracted mind cannot achieve this attentiveness. Constant interruptions weaken not only concentration but also memory, making it difficult to retain what has been read.

The path forward begins with conscious restraint. While a complete disconnection may feel daunting, small steps toward a "digital detox" are both practical and necessary. Start by setting aside short segments of time each day that are free of screens—times dedicated solely to reading or reflection. Gradually, these periods can be extended into larger blocks. Such moments of digital silence not only free the mind for study but also bring rest to the eyes and calm to the heart.

Classical scholars would often withdraw from worldly noise to devote themselves to their books and writings. In our age, where the "noise" is largely digital, we must cultivate a similar discipline. Each of us must carve out our own Cave of Ḥirāʾ within the rhythm of daily life. By

silencing notifications, keeping devices out of reach while reading, and setting aside "sacred hours" free from screens, we begin to reclaim both our time and our attention. In that stillness, the mind — once freed from constant interruption — rediscovers its capacity for deep focus and tastes once again the true sweetness of learning.

## 12.5Restoring Depth in Reading and Comprehension

Another challenge of our age is the noticeable decline in ***language skills***. As people spend more time with simplified digital content—scrolling headlines, short posts, and bite-sized videos—the ability to engage with complex texts steadily weakens. A 2021 OECD study confirmed that reading comprehension among young adults is declining in many parts of the world, much of it linked to overreliance on quick, surface-level media.

For the seeker of knowledge, this decline is particularly dangerous. Our tradition is built upon texts of depth and precision—whether the Qurʾān, ḥadīth, or classical works of tafsīr, fiqh, and other sciences. These cannot be understood through skimming habits shaped by the digital world. They demand patience, attention, and familiarity with refined language.

The way forward is gradual rebuilding. One should start with shorter but serious works, then move on to more demanding texts, step by step. Keeping a vocabulary list, annotating difficult passages, and revisiting challenging sections all help deepen comprehension. Language tools and dictionaries can be aids, but nothing substitutes for consistent practice.

Equally important is the revival of meaningful discussion. Too often, the daily conversations within families — between husband and wife, parent and child — have become merely transactional: *Have you eaten? Yes. I liked the food. I'm going to school. I'm going to sleep.* Such exchanges lack depth, and the absence of real dialogue has become a crisis. If we wish to strengthen language skills and sharpen decision-making — in our children and in ourselves — we must bring back *mukālama*: genuine, two-sided conversation. We should be able to sit together and speak about

serious topics for half an hour, forty minutes, or more. We should learn to articulate our points with clarity, and just as importantly, to listen attentively and understand the perspective of others. It is *mukālama* — the exchange of thoughtful words — that makes this possible and that nourishes both intellect and heart.

By steadily increasing the complexity of what we read, and by training ourselves to reflect, to engage in *mukālama*, to discuss, to listen, and to internalize, we safeguard ourselves against the erosion of language skills and ready ourselves to benefit from the vast and rich heritage of our scholarship.

## 12.6Strengthening Concentration and Consistency

The previous section addressed the decline in language and comprehension skills. This section turns to another challenge: the decline in concentration. Increasingly, even those with strong language and comprehension abilities struggle to read more than a few pages at a time. A 2020 Microsoft study reported that attention spans are shrinking, with many people finding it difficult to sustain focus for more than a few minutes — especially when faced with longer texts. Readers often abandon books prematurely, not because the content lacks value, but because their capacity for deep concentration has been eroded by constant digital interruptions and the pace of modern media.

The solution lies in gradually training the mind to focus again. One practical way is to set short, regular periods of focused reading followed by brief breaks, slowly increasing the length of focus over time. This conditions the brain to sustain attention for longer stretches. Likewise, a brief moment of calm—through silence, deep breathing, or dhikr (remembrance of Allah)—before beginning can help clear mental clutter and sharpen focus.

When striving to regain concentration, the first steps will feel uphill. In those moments, the mind looks for any excuse to abandon the task — a bell ringing, a phone notification, even the sudden thought of hunger and

the urge to wander to the kitchen. Here, restraint must be practiced. With repetition, the mind gradually learns that during reading, such distractions are not to be indulged. As our elders observed, the heart opens to knowledge when diversions are set aside and the mind is anchored in purpose. Through discipline and presence of mind, the seeker of knowledge can once again experience the depth and sweetness of sustained reading.

Another helpful strategy is to vary the form and genre of reading. Switching between printed books, e-books, and audiobooks can make the experience more engaging and prevent monotony. Likewise, alternating between fiction and non-fiction, or exploring new genres, can keep the mind fresh, prevent burnout, and preserve enthusiasm for learning.

## 12.7Addressing Learning Anxiety

Many seekers of knowledge experience anxiety when faced with the sheer vastness of what there is to learn or the size of the task at hand. Endless shelves of books, countless subjects, and the constant reminder of how little one knows can create a sense of paralysis.

I experience this myself when writing. Once a manuscript is complete, I feel excited and eager to release it to readers as soon as possible. Yet in the process of reviewing, I often re-read, revise, re-write, and re-order large portions of the work. This can be time-consuming, and after much effort I sometimes realize that what still remains feels greater than what I have already done. At such moments, 'task anxiety' can creep in. My instinct is to shut everything off and either do something completely different or go to sleep. This is natural, and it can happen to anyone.

The good news, however, is that there are practical ways to overcome such anxieties before they sap our motivation. Left unchecked, stress drains energy and undermines progress; but with the right mindset and tools, learning anxiety can be managed — even transformed into positive energy.

**irst and foremost, seek strength from Allah.** Constant duʿāʾ for tawfīq and barakah in time, coupled with regular dhikr, nurtures the heart with

tranquility. Pray two rakʿāt at times permitted for prayer, asking Allah to remove anxiety and bless your effort. Allah ﷻ reminds us: *"Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest"* (Qur'an 13:28). Beginning a study session with duʿāʾ and dhikr realigns one's effort with its ultimate purpose: seeking knowledge for His sake.

**Second, adopt sound learning habits[30].** Break large goals into smaller, manageable tasks, and focus on completing them one step at a time. Celebrate each small milestone — finishing a section, solving a problem, or grasping a new concept. These "small wins" build confidence and gradually melt away the sense of being overwhelmed.

**Finally, care for your body and mind.** Simple practices — deep breathing, stretching, short breaks in natural surroundings, or walks by the ocean and among greenery — ease mental strain and restore focus. The Prophet ﷺ himself taught balance, reminding us that the body has rights just as the soul does.

By cultivating calmness and relying on Allah, the student of knowledge can turn anxiety into determination. Learning then ceases to be a burden and becomes instead a source of joy, serenity, and closeness to the One who commanded: *"Say, 'My Lord, increase me in knowledge'"* (Qur'an 20:114).

## 12.8Expanding Access to Books

For some, the challenge is not a lack of will to read, but a lack of access. In certain regions, Islamic books remain out of reach due to financial constraints or geographical isolation. This barrier can prevent the development of a consistent reading habit, even for those who are motivated.

Alḥamdulillāh, in our times there are more solutions available than ever before. Free online resources such as *Maktaba Shamila*, *Project Gutenberg* and other digital repositories host thousands of classic works that can be

[30] We have explained them with a little more detail in section 12.1

accessed worldwide. Many local and national libraries now provide e-book lending services, allowing readers to borrow books digitally from their own homes. Community-based initiatives also play a vital role: establishing shared book programs, neighborhood libraries, or even small reading circles can multiply access where resources are scarce.

The Qur'an itself reminds us of the value of cooperation in goodness: "*And cooperate in righteousness and piety*" (al-Māʾidah 5:2). In the same spirit, creating collective solutions for access to books ensures that knowledge is not confined to the privileged few, but shared and spread for the benefit of all.

# 13. How to Cultivate a Culture of Reading

This chapter can be considered a continuation of section 3.5, "Creating a Culture of Reading and Loving Books", where we highlighted examples of how the Aslāf cultivated a deep love for books and knowledge. If we hope to revive such a culture in our own time, we must draw inspiration from those roots while also adapting to the needs of our age. The suggestions in this chapter are intended to extend that earlier discussion, offering practical steps to help us re-establish a vibrant culture of reading in our homes and communities.

A culture of reading does not arise in isolation; it flourishes when individuals, families, institutions, and entire societies collectively cherish books and strive to place ʿilm at the heart of their way of life. The Prophet ﷺ emphasized the pursuit of knowledge as a communal duty (*farḍ kifāyah*), and Muslim history bears witness to how this duty was fulfilled: through the founding of libraries, the organization of *ḥalaqāt* and circles of study, and the circulation of books — all of which lay at the core of our vibrant intellectual tradition.

Today, reviving such an environment demands both personal dedication and intentional collective effort. From the quiet shelves of a home library to the halls of public institutions, from intimate book circles to expansive digital platforms — every initiative helps to rebuild a culture where reading is not merely practiced, but valued, cherished, and made a natural part of daily life. The points that follow highlight practical ways in which reading can once again be woven into the very fabric of our lives.

## 13.1Building Home Libraries

One of the most effective ways to encourage reading within a household is by establishing a home library. This need not be a grand or elaborate collection—just a dedicated space where books are visible and easily

accessible. Children, in particular, are far more likely to pick up a book when it is within reach. Even a modest home library silently communicates the value of learning and nurtures curiosity, reflection, and a shared family engagement with knowledge.

I can attest to this from personal experience. I benefitted immensely from the small library my father built in our home. It was his books — from Kulliyāt-e-Iqbāl to the writings of the Saints to works of mizāḥ (humor) — that we would often take out and read. He also made a habit of buying us books, sometimes monthly, sometimes every few months, and over time these purchases blossomed into our own little library. My brother and I, still children then, would eagerly arrange the volumes, draw up catalogues, and sort them into categories. I still cherish those memories, for the seeds planted in those early years grew into a lifelong love of books and libraries, al-ḥamdu lillāh.

## 13.2Reading Storybooks Aloud to Children

Before a child ever steps into a classroom, he should already be introduced to books in the home. Parents and older siblings play a vital role here. By reading aloud short, engaging stories—especially those with colorful pictures and illustrations—they nurture the child's natural curiosity and love for books. The process should be gradual: first cultivating an eagerness to listen, then drawing the child into retelling the story in his own words, and finally guiding him toward independent reading once he has learned to read and write. Along the way, parents should maintain consistent attention by discussing new books with the child, asking for his impressions, and gently steering his interests toward what is wholesome and beneficial.

This responsibility requires care. Every child has different tastes and capacities, and forcing books that are too difficult or unappealing can harm his interest in reading altogether. Parents must therefore choose wisely—avoiding literature with negative or harmful themes, such as tales of horror or inappropriate content, which may leave lasting marks on a child's psyche. Instead, they should provide books that cultivate

faith, good morals, and imagination without misleading the child. While stories and fables are often the most appealing, a healthy variety is essential: accounts of the lives of great personalities, inspiring true stories, and well-chosen educational works can broaden horizons. The goal is not to overwhelm the child with quantity, but to ensure quality engagement—reading with understanding, reflection, and benefit. When approached in this way, storybooks become not mere entertainment, but stepping stones toward a lifelong love of purposeful reading.

## 13.3Enhancing School and University Libraries

Educational institutions play a central role in shaping lifelong reading habits. Libraries in schools and universities should be more than repositories of books; they should function as vibrant centers of exploration and intellectual growth. Alongside textbooks, their shelves should include a broad range of materials—mutoon (foundational texts), shurūḥāt (commentaries), biographies, history, works on Islamic thought and movements, and writings on contemporary issues—so that students can engage with knowledge in its full depth and variety.

Practical initiatives such as reading weeks, book fairs, student-led book selection, and themed exhibitions can bring these spaces to life and foster a sense of ownership among students. When learners experience the library as a place of discovery rather than obligation, their enthusiasm for reading flourishes, and a foundation is laid for a lifelong relationship with books.

## 13.4Creating Public and Masjid Libraries

Public libraries are vital communal assets, providing free and equal access to knowledge. They should not be limited to lending books but serve as centers of learning, hosting activities such as beneficial lectures, book clubs, reading circles, workshops, and storytelling sessions. Mobile libraries can also reach rural or underserved areas, ensuring that no community is left deprived of the blessing of knowledge.

Equally important is the role of the masjid library. Throughout Islamic

history, the masjid was the heartbeat of knowledge—where Qurʾān, ḥadīth, fiqh, and other sciences were taught. In our time, mosques should revive this tradition by establishing well-curated libraries rich with tafsīr works, commentaries on ḥadīth, biographies of the scholars, and writings on Islamic thought and movements. Such resources not only strengthen the intellectual life of a community but also keep the masjid firmly at the center of both worship and knowledge.

I can recall from my own experience how powerful such libraries can be. In a masjid library in Perth, I stumbled upon the famous tafseer *Maʿāriful Qurʾān*. Out of curiosity, I read its foreword, which contains an excellent summary of ʿUlūm al-Qurʾān and Uṣūl al-Tafsīr. That encounter opened for me many doors: I drew upon it in different contexts, gained a deep respect for that noble scholarly work, and carried its insights into both study and teaching.

Where public libraries already exist, especially in the Western context, Muslims should contribute by depositing beneficial Islamic books—including authentic translations of Qurʾān, tafsīr, ḥadīth, and works on Islamic civilization—so that the broader public can access them. In this way, libraries become a means of daʿwah as well as education, offering seekers of truth a doorway to the treasures of Islamic knowledge.

Such initiatives remind us that when knowledge is made accessible in public spaces such as masājid, it plants seeds that may grow for years to come. By building, enriching, and supporting libraries at the heart of our communities, we revive a Sunnah of learning and ensure that knowledge remains a living, shared treasure.

## 13.5Incorporating Books into Curriculum Design

Beyond textbooks, education systems should weave supplementary reading into their programs to nurture both intellectual breadth and spiritual depth. At the heart of this must be the foundational works of tafsīr and ḥadīth, which connect students directly to the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Alongside these, carefully chosen books on sīrah, history, Islamic

movements, and contemporary thought can broaden horizons and cultivate awareness of the world and its challenges.

While secondary in importance, fiction also has a valuable role. Today, a growing body of Islamic and general character-building fiction is available in many languages. Such works—when grounded in sound values—can nurture imagination, empathy, and moral reflection in ways that complement non-fiction. Used wisely, they enrich language skills, creativity, and emotional intelligence.

Embedding this diversity of reading into curricula ensures that books are not seen merely as tools for passing exams but as lifelong companions for growth. A well-rounded curriculum not only equips students with academic knowledge but also inspires them to become thoughtful, value-driven, and curious seekers of truth.

## 13.6Trusted Recommendations and Reading Lists

Trusted recommendations from scholars, teachers, and experts help guide readers toward works that are both beneficial and reliable. A curated list of books—whether tied to a discipline, a course, or general enrichment—saves time, provides direction, and motivates readers to stay the course. When these lists are shared through classes, newsletters, or community platforms, they ensure wider access to quality works and nurture purposeful reading.

Alḥamdulillāh, in our time such guidance is readily available. Scholars and intellectuals such as Maulana Khaleel ur Rahman Chishti, Shaykh Ibn ʿUthaymīn, Mufti Taqi Usmani, Ustadh Nouman Ali Khan, Ustadh Adnan Rashid, and many others have offered valuable recommendations for students of knowledge. Similarly, syllabi prepared by tehreeki organizations such as Islami Jamiat-e-Talaba Pakistan, Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, the Islamic Circle of Australia and New Zealand (iCAN), ICNA in North America, the UK Islamic Mission, and other Islamic movements worldwide provide excellent structured foundations.

Benefiting from these reading lists connects the individual to a larger ummatic tradition of learning and activism. They ensure that one's reading journey is not random or shallow, but anchored in works that have shaped generations of scholars, thinkers, and workers in the field of Islamic revival. To neglect these treasures would be to deprive oneself of maps that can guide the path of both personal growth and collective effort.

## 13.7Encouraging Book Clubs and Reading Circles

Book clubs create social spaces for meaningful engagement with books. Whether among children, young adults, or professionals, they offer opportunities to share insights, discuss themes, and develop a collective love for reading. Study circles, modeled on the traditional ḥalaqāt, strengthen both comprehension and community bonds, while online reading groups can extend participation across borders.

## 13.8Establishing Digital Libraries and Free E-Book Access

In an era of digital accessibility, e-books and online libraries can bridge gaps where physical books are scarce. Schools, universities, and community centers should provide free access to digital platforms, while communities can promote resources like Project Gutenberg or national digital archives. By making knowledge portable and inexpensive, digital libraries expand the reach of reading to all.

## 13.9Reading Challenges and Incentives

Incentive-based reading programs add motivation and joy to the reading journey. Schools, workplaces, and community centers can organize challenges that recognize and reward participants for meeting set goals. Certificates, small prizes, or even public acknowledgment can turn reading into a celebrated milestone.

One effective way to enhance this is through gamification—introducing elements of play and competition into reading habits. For example, participants can earn points for each book completed, unlock levels as

they progress, or compete in friendly leaderboards. Such approaches are particularly effective for children and youth, who thrive on achievement and recognition.

By transforming reading from a solitary task into a shared, rewarding experience, these challenges nurture consistency and enthusiasm. Over time, what begins as a game can blossom into a genuine love for books and lifelong learning.

## 13.10 9. Snippets and Summaries for Busy Readers

For those daunted by lengthy books, shorter summaries, snippets, or reviews can provide an accessible entry point. Platforms offering condensed versions help busy professionals or hesitant readers engage with knowledge and may gradually lead them to explore full texts. This approach lowers the barrier to entry without undermining the value of complete works.

## 13.11 Using Books as Gifts

Gifting books is a timeless way of encouraging reading. A thoughtfully chosen book can introduce someone to new ideas, expand their worldview, or deepen their passion in a subject. Presenting books on occasions such as birthdays, graduations, or milestones transforms them into meaningful treasures and reinforces the importance of reading at pivotal stages of life.

The Prophet ﷺ emphasized the power of gifts in nurturing bonds of love and connection. Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ تَهَادُوا تَحَابُّوا

*"Give each other gifts and you will love each other."*
*(al-Adab al-Mufrad, 594; graded ḥasan according to Imam Ibn Ḥajar)*

In this light, giving a book is more than a material gesture—it is a means

of strengthening love between hearts while also offering knowledge that benefits in this world and the Hereafter. A book gifted with sincerity thus carries a double blessing: it nurtures relationships and spreads beneficial knowledge.

## 13.12 Conclusion

Cultivating a culture of reading is both a personal responsibility and a collective project. From setting up a shelf at home to building public libraries, from gifting books to organizing circles of discussion, every effort strengthens the foundation of a knowledge-based society. If each home, school, and community takes even small steps, the habit of reading will revive—bringing with it the clarity, wisdom, and depth that our times so urgently need.

# Sama-O-Basr

A PROJECT OF

Islamic Circle of Australia and New Zealand